


# 365 DEVOTIONS



*Be still,  
and know  
that I  
am God.*

Psalm 46:10



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# DEVOTIONS

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## January

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photo by H. Armstrong Roberts  
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January 1

## PRAISE THE NAME OF GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 42:10-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, (Isaiah 42:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Praise Him! Praise Him!"

Isaiah 42 refers to Israel as the servant. Israel was God's chosen nation. It was a people with a special purpose. The prophet states that the servant has the responsibility to bring God's words to the world and through the Word of God bring justice to the nations. What an awesome responsibility!

We see in Isaiah 42 that the Old Testament prophecy proclamation has a present and future reference. Isaiah was delivering God's Word to the covenant people—the Jews. But it also referred to an event that was to follow later. Jesus quoted Isaiah 42:1-3 when He warned His disciples to not reveal His identity to the public (Matthew 12:15-21).

God is calling us to praise Him with a new song. He is the creator and sustainer of all things. His name is Lord, the only God. He is the source of our being. He gives us life and understanding so that we can enjoy His universe.

When Jesus made His last entry into Jerusalem, people were praising and singing to His honor. The religious leaders asked Jesus to rebuke His disciples for making such a noisy scene. Jesus replied, "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40, *New International Version*). God will be praised! Let us sing and praise the name of God today.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, help me to be a witness for You. Help me to guide others to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

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January 1-7. Willard Walls and his wife, Ruth, serve as new church planters in the West Midlands near Birmingham, England.



## WHEN WE CANNOT SEE

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 42:18-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The blind receive sight, and the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor (Matthew 11:5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"

Blindness to the will of God was a chief sin of Israel. The prophets called Israel to repentance and the nation was humbled. But, unfortunately, history reveals that the nation often returned to their own selfish ways and ignored their God. His authority was mocked by the seed of Abraham. "Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and haughtily lifted your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel!" (Isaiah 37:23, *Revised Standard Version*). When we mock God we will be disciplined, just as parents discipline their children for disrespect. You can undoubtedly recall a situation in your childhood or adulthood when you felt the consequences of disregarding authority.

Ignoring the will of God and His authority makes as little sense as trying to balance your checkbook without following the basic rules of arithmetic. The results will be inaccurate. The only way to have purpose and meaning in our lives is to find the will of God through His Word, understand that will and then follow through by living according to His mandates.

The New Testament letter of James has much to say. God will honor our efforts in recognizing His desires for our lives.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, please free me from the bondage of all the world's temptations. Forgive me when I have mocked Your Word and will. Help me to see Your desires for my life and to hold onto those desires with all my heart and mind. In the name of my Savior, Jesus, amen.

January 3

## JESUS, OUR REDEEMER

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 43:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David," (Luke 1:68, 69, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "When upon Life's Billows"

Nothing compares to the grace of the Lord God. By His grace we are saved.

God restored Israel to a place of honor and called the people by His name. They had left His will through sin, but God repossessed His creation. God reminds them that He will watch over them. "Fire and water" will hold no fear for Israel. "I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

During the early days of the church, Peter and the apostles were brought before the Jewish council in Jerusalem. The council demanded the followers of Jesus to abstain from teaching about Jesus' resurrection. They refused and Peter gave his testimony. (Read Acts 5:31, 32).

As God called Israel by name, He calls us today to a Name. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11, *Revised Standard Version*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, heavenly Father, for delivering me out of darkness and calling me to the name that is above every name. Thank You, Father, for protecting me from danger and harm as You did in the ancient past with Israel. In the name of my Savior, amen.

## WE GIVE WITNESS

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 43:8-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations"

There are three basic truths that come from today's Scripture: Israel can return to God in repentance, false gods have no defense, and there is only one true God.

In my early Christian walk I was concerned that there might be some unpardonable sin that would forever separate me from God. Recently I talked with a university student that believed that God could not possibly love her. The promise of 2 Peter 3:9 (*Revised Standard Version*), "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" was the release of this bondage and lie of Satan. There is no sin that God cannot forgive except the refusal of acknowledging Jesus as Savior.

God said to Israel: "Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me." When Israel accepted this truth, the nation was blessed and became a mighty witness to the nations around them. The same thing happens individually and corporately in the church today. Paul tells Timothy, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," (1 Timothy 2:5, *Revised Standard Version*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, help me to acknowledge You as the only God. Thank You for Your gracious love and forgiveness that takes away ALL sin. Praise His name, amen.

January 5

## GOD'S PRESENT WORK

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 43:14-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Isaiah 43:19, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty"

This devotion begins with the admonition to "sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth!" (Isaiah 42:10). Isaiah describes God as a Redeemer. God is Israel's redeemer because of the covenant relationship. In the time of Moses, God said to the Israelites, "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine," (Exodus 19:5, *Revised Standard Version*). God is a covenant God. Looking forward to the time of Jesus, Jeremiah declared, "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel . . . says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33, *Revised Standard Version*). The church is under a covenant. It is called the New Testament.

We celebrate that covenant as we observe the Lord's Supper. "In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'" (1 Corinthians 11:25, *Revised Standard Version*). God is the church's redeemer not because of any merit but because of His faithfulness to the new covenant made through His Son, Jesus Christ.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, guide me to be faithful to Your covenant. In Jesus' name, amen.



## LEAVING THE OLD BEHIND US

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 2:1-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "My Anchor Holds"

Today's Scripture is about our past, present and future. Paul describes our past life as one ruled by the prince of the power of the air (verse 2) or the spirit of disobedience. Our possession by this evil spirit, Satan, is history. The Christian has been liberated by Jesus to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; (Isaiah 61:1, *Revised Standard Version*).

Paul wants us to understand that the movement from the old life to the new is by the grace of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9, *Revised Standard Version*).

The power of God has moved us from our past life of sin, to the present state of grace. It allows us to see our place in the future, "... and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6, *Revised Standard Version*). Our place with Jesus is made clearer in 2 Timothy 2:12: "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (*Revised Standard Version*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Father, for saving me. Help me, to hold close the truth that I am Your workmanship, created for good works. Amen.



January 7

## TAKING SIDES

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 12:22-32

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand; (Matthew 12:25, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Who Is on the Lord's Side?"

Today's Scripture is about taking sides. Two kingdoms co-exist: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. Jesus, explaining the choices we have to make said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24, *Revised Standard Version*). We must choose sides, there is no middle ground. We cannot select from the teachings of Jesus only those that suit us. When Moses brought the tables of stone down from Mt. Sinai, he did not say to the people, "Here are ten commandments God has given, select any three." Jesus' directive in this passage is unequivocal: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30, *Revised Standard Version*).

The Holy Spirit empowers us to move from the kingdom of the world to the kingdom of God. "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, *Revised Standard Version*). It is Jesus' alone who can renew our lost relationship with the Father. To attempt salvation by any other means is futile. Forgiveness is in Jesus only.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, thank You for Your power to bind the strong man and to plunder the kingdom of the evil one. Through Your power I have been delivered. I am forever grateful. Amen.

## WHERE IS GOD?

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 139:7-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "How Great Thou Art!"

Have events occurring in your life ever caused you to wonder, "Where is God?" We may wonder if God can hear us.

An officer who had just been promoted to the rank of colonel was sitting at his desk glancing proudly at the "birds" on his shoulders. A private walked into his new office, saluted, and was about to speak when the colonel said, "Just a minute, Soldier. I have to make an important telephone call." The colonel dialed a number and said, "Hello, General Sherman. I'm returning your call. You want me to meet with you and two other generals? At 5:00 this evening? Yes, I'll be there."

Hanging up the receiver he spoke to the soldier. "Now, Private, what can I do for you?"

The private responded, "I've been sent to hook up your telephone, Sir!" Obviously that colonel did not talk to the general, nor did he impress the young man.

God is everywhere. He's available to us every hour of the day. We don't have to pretend we're talking to Him. Any time we pray, God is listening. He cares about us and His power is sufficient to guide us through everything we face in life.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, we are thankful that You hear us when we pray. We want to go where You will not be ashamed to go with us. Give us the strength and wisdom to make right decisions each day. In Jesus' name, amen.

**January 9**

## **GOD, HOW DID YOU KNOW THAT?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 33:13-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his (Job 12:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

God not only knows everything, He also remembers to keep His promises.

The minister was asked to visit a widely respected Christian in the community by the name of Mr. Clanson. He had been in poor health for some time, and many thought he did not have long to live. When the minister arrived at his home, he found him in a very disturbed condition. Mr. Clanson said, "I'm ninety-two years old now, and all my life I've been memorizing and claiming the promises of God. But this morning when I awakened, I couldn't remember even one of those promises.

The minister thought for a moment and then said, "You may have forgotten God's promises, but do you think for one moment God has forgotten them?" As the older man thought about that, a smile crossed his face. He knew the answer very well, and it brought comfort to his soul. The minister then quoted promise after promise from the Bible. Finally the dying man said, "I'm so tired, I'll just go to sleep now and trust God to remember His promises." Shortly afterward, he slipped quietly into the presence of the Lord.

God knows our thoughts, our needs and our deeds. He wants to help us. He shares our joys and our disappointments.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, I realize that nothing is going to happen to me today that You and I can't handle. I find peace when I understand that You know everything. I love You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## GOD CAN DO ANYTHING!

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 32:17-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power, that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church, (Ephesians 3:20, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

Some people think they're more important than they really are. We should be careful not to give people the impression that we believe we're a lot better than they are.

George Bernard Shaw once boasted about his great skill at making a good cup of coffee. A country parson heard about it and wrote to ask him how he did it. Shaw responded by giving the secret, but added, “I hope this is a genuine request and not just a trick to secure my autograph.” The preacher could not let the implication of that remark go unanswered. So he sent him a letter in reply. It read, “Accept my thanks for the directions to make coffee. I wrote in good faith. To convince you of that, however, allow me to return what it is obvious you highly prize, but which is of no value to me—your autograph.” Shaw had to eat “humble pie!”

Yes, God can do anything. It's right that we should honor Him, worship Him, and let Him know how much we respect Him. He alone is worthy of such praise.

We are limited in the power we have and the things we can do. We all need God. We also need to learn to get along with one another and help each other in any way we can.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty God, give us courage to trust You more. Remind us to be humble and good to each other. Thank You! In Jesus' name, amen.

January 11

## GOD IS VERY GOOD TO US

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 130: 1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions (Ephesians 2:4, 5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us"

While traveling on a Delaware River steamboat, Ira Sankey was recognized by some of the passengers. They had seen his picture in the newspaper and knew that he was associated with evangelist D. L. Moody. When he was asked to sing one of his own compositions, Sankey said he preferred the hymn by William Bradbury, "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us." He suggested that everyone should join with him in the singing.

One stanza begins, "We are Thine; do Thou befriend us, be the Guardian of our way." When he finished, a man said, "Were you in the army, Mr. Sankey?"

"Yes, I joined up in 1860."

"Did you ever do guard duty at night in Maryland?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, I was in the Confederate Army," said the stranger, "and I saw you one night at Sharpsburg. You were wearing your blue uniform, and I had you in my gunsight as you stood there in the light of the full moon. Then just as I was about to pull the trigger, you began to sing." Sankey was astounded as he recalled the incident. "It was the same hymn you sang tonight," continued the man. "My mother sang it often. I realized you were a Christian, and I couldn't shoot you."

How wonderful is the mercy of God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, God, for Your love and mercy. Help me to show love and kindness to others. In Jesus' name, amen.



## OUR GOD GIVES US PEACE

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 26:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “It Is Well With My Soul”

Dr. John Cannon was once called in as a consultant by the leaders of a church that was having great dissension about a relatively small issue. Two committees had given conflicting recommendations about redecorating their building. One said it should be painted white; the other insisted that yellow would make it look more attractive and up-to-date. After the two groups vigorously restated their cases, the dispute became bitter, harsh, and divisive. Dismayed by the angry speeches that were disrupting the fellowship of the entire church, Dr. Cannon said quietly, “Here’s my advice to you. Don’t paint it white; don’t paint it yellow; paint your church black! It will be very appropriate for an assembly that ought to go into mourning for having such a shameful quarrel.” That sharp arrow hit its mark. The members were made to see that their ranting and spiteful comments had grieved the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 12:18 we read, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (*New International Version*). God is the power that enables us to live in peace.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, as Your children, we know it brings much joy to You when we get along with one another and don’t fight. Help us to see the good in other people. May we be willing to encourage those who are weak, rather than to judge them. Thank You for making peace available to us through Jesus Christ. In His name, amen.

January 13

## SALVATION IS A GIFT FROM GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 48:9-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Jesus Saves"

A farmer had a beautiful plaque in his home. It read: "*But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" It expressed his deepest feelings, for he prayed daily that his entire family might serve the Lord. The last clause applied to everyone except his oldest son, who refused to accept Christ.

One day when the father and son were alone in the room where the motto hung, the father said with deep emotion, "Sammy, my dear boy, I just cannot be a liar any longer. You belong to my house, but you don't want to serve the Lord. I'm going to hang another sign right beneath this plaque. It will have to say, '*Except Sammy.*' It hurts me to do it, but I must be true to the Lord." The father's sincere words so impressed the young man that he began thinking seriously about his need of becoming a Christian. The Holy Spirit convicted him of his sinfulness, and before his dad was able to put up the second sign he gave his heart to the Lord. What rejoicing came to that home, for now the father could truthfully say that he and his entire house were one in the Lord!

Are you faithful to God? Are you grateful for your salvation and do you ask God to use you to win others to Christ?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** I thank You, God, for Jesus who paid the price for my sins. Help me to show more love to my family and to be a loving witness for You. In the precious name of Jesus, amen.

## FIND JOY IN THE LORD

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 48:17-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men (Romans 14:17, 18, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Down in My Heart”

An animal that is almost impossible to capture is the ring-tailed monkey of Africa. But the Zulu people have a trapping method that's both simple and effective. It's based on this little creatures' love for a particular melon that grows on a vine. The seeds are its favorite food. Knowing this, the Zulus cut a small hole in the melon, just large enough for the monkey to put his hand inside to get the delicious morsels. The unsuspecting little fellow reaches through the readymade door and grabs as many seeds as he can. But withdrawing his clenched fist is impossible, because now it is larger than the hole. He will pull and tug and scream and struggle to get free, but it's no use. As long as he holds on to his prized seeds, he is trapped by the melon—and the Zulus have captured one more ring-tailed monkey.

All too often we become trapped by accumulating more and more of this world's goods. Freedom and joy are found in allowing God to fill our lives with His truth and love. He can free us from greed and other sins that would enslave us. Let God have first place in your life and you will find true joy in being a Christian.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Creator of the universe, may I find true joy in living for You. Help me to not become greedy and waste energy on simply accumulating more. I want to serve You. In Jesus' name, amen.

**January 15**

## **GOD CAN BE TRUSTED**

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 49:7-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful (Isaiah 29:7).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

Explaining why he trusted a business partner, even in risky ventures, a man said, "It is simple. He has never lied to me."

God does what He promises. The book of Isaiah recounts God's punishment of His chosen people because of their rebellion against Him. It is also the record of God's promise that the Israelites would return from exile to their home. In both events God's Word was trustworthy.

The first returnees from Babylon would be a guarantee, "a covenant," to the rest of the people that God still loves, cares, and will release them from their enemy."

God makes promises to His children. We are reminded of what He has already done. We have been forgiven of our sin and established in the family of faith.

He can be trusted to fulfill His promise for our future. This new year offers opportunity but it also brings risk. The Christian walks into that future resting on God's presence to provide the resources for whatever comes with tomorrow.

Through the resurrection of Christ from the dead God assures us that when we face death He stands at the doorway to lead us to eternal life. God is faithful, rest in Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, help us to remember Your faithfulness always. In the name of Jesus, amen.

## GOD'S MARVELOUS MEMORY

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 49:14-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** They may forget, yet will I not forget thee (Isaiah 49:15).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

It is part of being human to question. In our hurt we wonder if He cares for us. We are no different from Israel who in their captivity accused God of forsaking them.

In response to Israel's complaint, God used powerful imagery to express the permanency of His memory of His people. "So lasting," says God, "is My love that I have literally tattooed on the palms of My hand the plans for the city walls that will be built when Israel returns home." Then to express how warm and compassionate is that remembered love, God reminds His children that even if the mother could forget the baby feeding at her breast, God could not forget His people.

Two long time friends of mine—husband and wife—are both suffering with terminal cancer. The husband said, "I know that God doesn't forget us or put more on us than we can bear. But I wish God did not have such a high opinion of us." Then in a more serious vein, the wife said, "Strange as it may seem to our non-Christian friends, even in our illness we have discovered peace. We are sure that God is present with us and, even in our agony, we are confident that God will do as He always has done. He will see us through this final trial."

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Help us, O God, to remember that You have promised that in the midst of our greatest fears You will not fail nor forsake us. Give us peace as we rest in that promise. Amen.



**January 17**

## **GOD IS A PROMISE KEEPER**

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 49:19-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** They shall not be ashamed that wait for me (Isaiah 49:23).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Revive Us Again"

A wag has pointed out that as a result of gene splicing scientists have succeeded in crossing a parrot with a lion. They are not certain what they have. But when it talks, you listen.

Israel forgot that when God speaks He means what He says. But they learned from personal experience that sin brings punishment. Actions have consequences.

Israel needed to have the same confidence in God's promise that He would give them freedom and restore them to their nation. They needed a firm conviction that their enemies, now towering over them, would be broken. Then the world would know that God is the Savior and the Mighty One.

God does not promise that He will restore what we have lost through our sin or circumstances. Some sins have lasting consequences. Some destroy the body. Others are destructive to relationships. Marriages are irretrievably broken. Businesses go bankrupt. God does promise that He will restore us as persons. God reminds His people that sin, when it is acknowledged and repented of, does not destroy a life. God stands ready to restore the repentant ones. In our relationship with Him we will discover new life.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, we acknowledge that sometimes in our selfsufficiency we overreach ourselves and assume we no longer have to submit to Your authority. It is in these moments that we know the despair of alienation from You. We ask for Your forgiveness and pray that You will restore us to You. In the name of Your Son, we pray, amen.

## GOD LOVES US ALL

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 56:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Isaiah 56:7).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Jesus Loves the Little Children"

Isaiah speaks to Israel about the future when they return to Jerusalem. They will then be tempted to take God for granted. Israel is warned that they must be careful not to substitute ritual for reality and to guard against an arrogance that would begin to be exclusive in their relationships. In their regard for others they must include the outcast for God is the God of all people.

This became very personal to me in those troubling days when the Church was reaching out to embrace all of God's people. One of our families invited an Asian couple to worship services. When another member saw the family she said, "Who told them they could come here?" However, the general attitude of the fellowship was summed up by one southern gentlemen who said, "Brother Jones, all my life I have lived and worked with all colors and all kinds of people. I never had any trouble believing that God accepted them. It's just that we never thought of worshiping together." Then he added, "But if God can accept me with my sin then I can certainly accept those whom God accepts."

God accepts those who have bound themselves to the Lord; who keep his commands and hold fast to His covenant. Can those who are in God's family do anything less?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, help us to recognize our prejudice; to bring that sin to You; to ask for strength to deal with it and to become inclusive in all of our relationships. We pray in the name of Jesus, amen.

January 19

## ALL IDOLS FAIL US

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 57:1-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land (Isaiah 57:13).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Nothing Between"

No sooner had the Jews returned to Jerusalem than they began worshiping idols. This pursuit of evil was so strong that groups made long pilgrimages to the shrines of the foreign gods. They were so determined to worship those idols that they endured any hardship. They came to fear the punishment inflicted by the gods of their enemies more than they respected the God of Israel. They misunderstood God's patience. They thought His unwillingness to carry out His punishment against them was because of God's inability. They were tragically wrong. There would come a time when they would cry for help. Then their collection of idols would not save them. They would be carried off like a wind, and the breath of God's judgment would blow them away.

What does this have to do with us? Everyone has a god or gods. We all have something or someone to whom we give our supreme allegiance. Our god is whatever is the central reliance of our life. We convince ourselves that the gods we create out of our minds meet our needs.

These substitutes for the living God will fail us in the great moment of accountability. Nothing that takes God from the central place in our life will bring lasting joy.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Lord, help us to give up the right to run our course. Convince us that You know best how life is to be lived. Help us to turn it over to You. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

## GOD'S HEALING POWER

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 57:14-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases (Psalm 103:2, 3).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Cleanse Me"

A man driving along a Texas highway saw an army truck parked on the side of the road. He offered the driver a ride to the nearest service station. The embarrassed driver explained that the vehicle was a gasoline tanker carrying five thousand gallons of fuel—enough to take him around the world—but the fuel was useless because the gas was locked up in the tanker and the key was at the army base.

It is easy to blame God when we seem powerless in the face of problems. However, when we examine the situation we understand that it is not the fault of God. It is that we have failed to take advantage of the resources God provides.

God's healing power is locked out when we are greedy for sinful gain. God is unable to heal so long as we continue our willful ways. However, God is available and powerful so that when we allow Him access to our lives He can cleanse and heal. When we remove the obstacle of unrepented sin, His healing power can, and will, permeate every part of our being.

His healing will be so evident that we will praise Him with our lips for His forgiveness and strength. However, God can enter only where we will allow Him. He can heal only that part of us that we make available to His restorative touch.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, we pray for the discipline to put ourselves in a position where Your power can work in us. Save us from those blockades to forgiveness and strength. In the name of Jesus, amen.

**January 21**

## **A FAITH THAT IS REAL**

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 58:1-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Trust in the Lord with all thine heart. . . . In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "His Eye Is on the Sparrow"

A distraught member confronted the minister. "I called the office last Monday and they said it was your day off. You can't take a day off. The devil never takes a day off."

"I know that," responded the minister, "but if I didn't take a day off now and then, pretty soon I would be just like him."

The Israelites chided God because they said, "You are not blessing our worship. We've fasted and You haven't seen it. We've humbled ourselves and You haven't noticed."

God responded, "This is because your fasting is an outward show of spirituality and is not expressed in your daily life. If you truly honor Me in keeping the Sabbath and in fasting, you'll no longer exploit your employees. Then there will be harmony within your fellowship and blessing from Me."

The purpose of all worship is to remind us of our relationship to God as well as our earthly responsibilities. It's to stimulate us to share food with the hungry, provide the poor wanderer with shelter, clothe the naked, and care of own needs in our families. When you do that, says God, your light will break forth as the dawn and your healing will quickly appear.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, it is so easy for those of us who have been in the church many years to fall into the habit of praying words without thought, singing songs without meaning, offering worship that is correct in style but devoid of substance. Make us sensitive so that worship and life are consistent. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.



## “FAIR WEATHER” FOLLOWERS

**SCRIPTURE:** Zephaniah 3:8-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace (Romans 11:5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “O, for a Faith That Will Not Shrink”

A high school football game turned into a spectator’s challenge when a winter storm blew cold wind and rain into the stadium. Parents and fans huddled under blankets, clutching tightly to cups of hot chocolate. At the end of the third quarter the home team was hopelessly behind and people began to leave. Those who had stayed were mostly parents and friends of players—people whose first priority was to demonstrate unwavering affection for their team.

God had many “fair weather” fans in ancient Israel. As long as life was easy they followed His commandments and participated in the spiritual life of their nation. But when the lure of paganism promised them instant pleasure or painless opinions they turned from God. Zephaniah pronounced judgment on his people and offered hope to those who had remained faithful. The “remnant of Israel,” those who were meek and humble, would be blessed and protected by God.

The concepts of loyalty and faithfulness are important for every society and are a part of every Christian’s life. With commitment, we can become a faithful remnant offering the light of salvation to a lost world.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, help me to deepen my devotion to You through personal study and worship. Help me to share Your love with others. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

January 23

## NO SECRETS HERE

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 5:6-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Heavenly Sunlight”

In March of 1994, the city of Tampa, Florida, grieved over the murder of a man at an automated bank machine. A suspect had approached the man, asked for his money, then shot him.

If all crimes committed in secret were suddenly made public, citizens would be totally overwhelmed. Only God knows the full extent of man's shame in pursuit of sinful desires. For this reason Paul warned against associating with those who do such things. In the end God will pour out His wrath on wicked people and their companions.

Christians pursue a much different direction in life. They are “children of light” and bear the fruits of goodness, righteousness and truth. They don't mind if others see their works since their goal is to please God.

As Christians we are often tempted to slip into darkness. In the darkness we can hide our secret sins from the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. In darkness we can deny ourselves and endure our private shame. But if we remember the forgiving power of our Redeemer Christ, we can keep our lives open before Him. Even though we have sinned, we can come before God with confidence in the knowledge of Jesus' saving blood.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, thank You for bringing me out of the darkness into the light of Your Son. Give me the courage to be honest with You. Thank You for Jesus, my Savior, amen.

## A HOPE TO LIVE BY

**SCRIPTURE:** I Peter 1:3-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you (Psalm 84:12, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Glory Be to God the Father"

On April 8, 1994, a Federal Express DC-10 cargo plane took off for San Jose, California. On board were three crew members and an off-duty pilot. A few minutes into the flight, the off-duty pilot burst into the cockpit with two claw hammers, a knife and a spear gun, and began attacking the crew. After a violent scuffle, the pilot regained control of the plane. He alone found the strength to land and deploy the emergency chutes.

It is difficult to know how someone will react in a crisis. Many persons become totally inept when called to make quick decisions. Others react logically and methodically.

The apostle Peter knew Christians who had remained true to their Lord under tremendous persecution. Their faith was similar to pure gold since it had been refined by the fire of grief and suffering. In fact, it was better than gold because it carried with it the promise of eternal life.

This principle of perseverance can encourage us in our daily Christian walk. When we encounter spiritual trials we can rejoice because we know we are being strengthened for greater service. God might also use our faith to bring hope into the lives of others. Rejoice when life seems most difficult. View every crisis as a part of God's conditioning process through which He prepared you to accomplish His purposes.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, help me endure trials with confidence. Thank You for giving to me a hope to live by. In the name of Jesus, amen.

**January 25**

## **SERVING WITH CONFIDENCE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 5:1-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "In My Life Lord, Be Glorified"

Who needs the dreaded "back seat driver?" No one likes to be told how to drive, especially by someone who doesn't have a clear view of the road.

Why do we listen to people who want to run our lives? Certainly we make mistakes and we will wisely consider positive criticisms from people who love us. On the other hand, only foolish people allow others to push them in a direction that goes against their better judgment.

In the case of the Galatians, false teachers were promoting the practice of circumcision as a prerequisite for salvation. They believed faith could be developed only through adherence to the Old Testament Law. Paul reminded his readers of God's grace offered through His Son, Jesus.

A strong faith can thrive only when one is certain of his salvation. This should not be confused with an arrogant attitude which says, "I have all of the answers." Rather, true confidence flows from the recognition of our sins and the assurance of forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Today, demonstrate your faith through good works. Serve God because your heart overflows with gratitude.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, thank You for saving me by the grace offered through Your Son Jesus. Help me to serve You in love. Amen.

## AHEAD OF THE HOUNDS

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 5:33-42

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Who Is on the Lord's Side?"

Webster's first definition of *persecute* is "to harass or oppress with ill-treatment." The verb *harass* is actually derived from the Old French word *hare*, a cry used to encourage hunting dogs during a chase. *Hare* later became *harer* which means "to set a dog on."

Human persecutors harass those with different beliefs or behaviors. Some of the earliest Christians were accused of treason when they refused to offer sacrifices to pagan gods.

The apostles were flogged because they insisted on sharing the message of Jesus with the city of Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin feared for their popularity and resented the suggestion that they were responsible for Christ's death.

When we practice our Christianity, we shall occasionally be persecuted. We must be careful not to view every criticism as persecution. On the other hand, we should not be surprised if some people don't like us because of the values we represent.

God can use us as His witnesses when others oppose us. Even our enemies can be influenced when we answer hatred with an attitude of grace.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, forgive me when my faith wavers under criticism. Fill me with Your love. Teach me to follow You, no matter what happens. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

**January 27**

## **THE ULTIMATE SECURITY SYSTEM**

**SCRIPTURE:** Revelation 21:22-27

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (Hebrews 6:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “God of Our Fathers”

A homeowner opened his front door and casually walked over to a panel on the wall to turn off his security alarm. As he touched the first number of his secret code his mind went blank. He had turned off his system many times before, but he could not remember the remaining numbers. Frantically he punched in random numbers, but to no avail. The alarm sounded and the homeowner slumped down in an chair to prepare an explanation for the police.

Security systems are designed for intruders. They determine who belongs and who doesn't. God has devised a means of guaranteeing the safety and sanctify of Heaven. Nothing impure or shameful can enter. The “Lambs’ book of life” records the names of those who are free to go in. Those who practice evil or who rebel against God are not welcome.

Unfortunately, until Christ comes again, we must live and work with people who have no respect for God. Our goal as Christians should be to reach out to these individuals with the saving message of Jesus.

Ask God to help you maintain your beliefs, even when others around you disagree. Hold on to the promise of eternity and the hope of a place where sin has no home. At the same time, pray for opportunities to share Jesus’ love with your world.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, thank You for Your love. Help me to live a life of unwavering faith as I seek to do Your will for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

## POWER AND MERCY

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 52:7-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty Reigns" (Revelation 19:6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Our God Reigns"

Coastal dwellers often witness the fury of nature as wind-swept waters pound beaches and seaside resorts. In a matter of hours, fierce winds and waves can form small islands or cut huge channels through existing landmass. Despite this risk, developers spend millions of dollars on construction, hoping to regain their investment before the next big storm.

Testing nature is one way of challenging a God of order and absolutes. If one ignores moral laws certain consequences follow. When Israel turned to idolatry, God withdrew His hand of protection. Internal and external threats soon eroded the power structure of the entire nation.

The results of sin can be devastating, but the prophet promises hope for those who lift their voices to God. Just as the nation of Israel could rise from ruins, so a broken and bruised soul can be spiritually restored.

Our daily hope rests in the promises of Jesus Christ who has saved us from sin and given us the promise of eternal life. Sin leads to sorrow and can bring great pain to us and to others. We find healing in a Savior who cleanses our souls and gives us the courage to face those we have hurt.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, forgive me when I disobey You. Thank You for Your mercy. Give me the strength to live with my mistakes and the confidence to begin each day anew. Amen.



## WHAT THE BIBLE IS FOR

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 78:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Give ear, O my people, to my law (Psalm 78:1).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "The Bible Stands Like a Rock Undaunted"

Five boys were making a snow man when Chuck's mom went next door to help the witch come down her slippery front steps and walk a block through the snow to the store. The boys called old Mrs. Willis the witch because she yelled at them when they cut across her yard.

"There goes the witch," Chuck said. "Let's make a big pile of snow on her front steps so she can't get in."

"I know a better trick," Joe answered. "Let's clear all the snow *off* her steps and walk so she *can* get in."

"Are you crazy?" Chuck demanded. "She hates us."

"I know," Joe explained, "but the Bible says to do good to people who hate you. We thought that was OK when we read it in Sunday school."

There was a big argument, but finally the boys decided to do what the Bible teaches. They got snow shovels and cleared all the steps and walks in front of the witch's little house. When Mrs. Willis came home, she actually smiled. The boys had never seen her smile before.

Think how many smiles there would be if kids and adults would always do what the Bible teaches. That's the reason we have the Bible.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for a book that helps us know what is right. Promise to keep on reading the Bible and doing what it teaches. Ask for help in finding good things to do, even for people who hate you.

## GOD TAKES CARE OF US

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 78:9-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above (James 1:17).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Trust and Obey"

That spice cake in the kitchen—where did it come from? Mom made it, of course, but the makings were coming our way long before she bought them in the store. The flour came from Kansas wheat; the sugar came from Louisiana cane; the vanilla flavor from Mexico; the spices came from exotic plants on the other side of the world.

In all the world, no plant grew till God made it. This year no plant grows without God's soil and sunshine, God's air and rain. Mom made that cake, but God gave it to us just as truly as He gave manna from Heaven to His people long ago. He gave us meat and potatoes too, and all the veggies. His giving may not seem as miraculous as the manna; but when you think about it, you know it is no less wonderful. Only God can do it!

When parents provide food, clothing and shelter, grateful children live by the parents' rules and the family is happy together. When the Father in Heaven provides all the things we need, parents and children together are wise and grateful enough to live by God's rules. That is the way to be happy on earth, and happier still in Heaven.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for your food, clothing and home. Has something made you especially happy today? Thank God for that. Since God has done so much for you promise to try to do what He wants you to do. Thank God for giving you family and friends to love you.

January 31

## ARE WE GRATEFUL TO GOD?

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 78:17-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good (Psalm 106:1).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Count Your Blessings"

When God's people left Egypt, they lived a long time in the desert before they came to the good country where God wanted them to live. The food they brought on the journey with them was soon gone, but God gave them a strange new food from the sky. The people asked, "What is it?" In their language that was *man hu*, so the strange food is still called manna.

Wouldn't you think all those people would be happy and grateful that God has given them food to eat each day? But no, after a while they grew tired of the daily food and began to grumble. They said they were tired of that manna. They wanted meat and fresh vegetables. They wanted food like the food they left in Egypt.

Are you and I happy and grateful because God gives us so many good things? Or do we whine and grumble because we can't afford a bigger house or a better car or a membership in the country club? Some people even cheat or steal to get more and better things. You can read about that in the newspaper.

Would we be happier if we would think more about the good things we have, and less about those we don't have? An old song says, "Count your many blessings." Is that good advice?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Take a few minutes to think about the good things you have enjoyed today or yesterday. Thank God for every one of them. If you really need something more, talk to God about that too, but promise you will never cheat or steal.

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# DEVOTIONS

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## February

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photo by H. Armstrong Roberts

**February 1**

## **WE HAVE TO DECIDE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 78:32-41

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children (Ephesians 5:1).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "True-Hearted, Whole-Hearted"

In a midwestern American city, a boy on the sidewalk was shot and killed by someone in a passing car. The shooter knew that murder was wrong; he just wanted to show that his gang ruled that street. In another town, some boys defaced the walls of a rest room with ugly spray painting. They knew it was wrong; they just wanted to prove that they could do wrong without being caught.

Do you sometimes have to decide between what you want to do and what you ought to do? That is nothing new. The people of Israel decided to do wrong so many times that God decided they must be punished. The verses we are reading today do not tell what wrong they did or what punishment came. Perhaps there was an epidemic in camp and many people died. The rest then stopped doing wrong. They did what God said was right, but their heart was not in it. They lied when they promised to keep on obeying God. Soon they were doing wrong again.

Why didn't God destroy them all? Why doesn't He destroy all of us when we do wrong? Because He loves us. He gives us another chance. Don't we love Him enough to do what we ought to do instead of what we want to do?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for loving you. Think of anything wrong you have done in the past twenty-four hours, and ask God to forgive you again. Promise to keep on reading the Bible and trying to do what you ought to do rather than what you want to do.

## REMEMBER AND RESPOND

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 78:42-55

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord (Psalm 33:12).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

There was a crisis in Egypt. God said the Hebrews should move to another country. The Egyptians said they should stay in Egypt and be slaves. Then Egyptian crops were destroyed by hail and locusts. An epidemic of disease killed Egyptian cattle and an epidemic of boils troubled Egyptian people. Finally, the firstborn person in every Egyptian family died. The Egyptians decided they could not fight against God.

God helped the Hebrews cross the Red Sea. He gave them manna while they lived in the desert. He helped them defeat hostile nations in the promised land. At last they settled down in their own free country.

Then came the saddest part of the story. The Hebrews forgot how God had helped them. They no longer cared what He wanted them to do. Then troubles came to them. You can read about it in Psalm 78:56-66.

Recent years have brought war, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, and other troubles in many nations: Russia, Bosnia, Israel, Somalia, South Africa, China, Korea, the United States. Christians in all parts of the world must seek to follow the teachings of the living God at all times.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Recently we have been counting our blessings. Perhaps today you want to mention a few more and give thanks for them. Promise to keep on remembering those good things. Promise to respond by doing what God wants you to do.

**February 3**

## **THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 78:67-72

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I am the good shepherd (John 10:11).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us”

David was a shepherd in a country where wild animals roamed—big animals. When a lion or a bear came looking for a lamb for his dinner, David had to meet the beast in hand-to-claw combat. David was strong and quick and brave; more than that, he trusted the Lord.

That was why David was not afraid of Goliath. You’ve heard of Goliath. That man was nearly ten feet tall! I wouldn’t want to be anywhere near his big spear. But David trusted God, so he stepped out and brought the giant down (1 Samuel 17:32-50).

David the shepherd became the shepherd of his people. They were like lost sheep, wandering from the right way and doing wrong. When David was their king he led them to do right. They were victorious in war and happy and prosperous in peace. The country became greater than it had ever been before.

God said David’s descendents would rule forever. That promise is fulfilled in Jesus. He is both the son of David and the Son of God, and He is king forever. He is our good shepherd, too. He always leads in the right way. To be safe and happy, we must follow Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for the Bible that tells us about Jesus and what He wants us to do. Promise to keep on reading the Bible and trying to do what it tells us to do. Ask God to help you lead other people to follow Jesus, too.



## DON'T RUN AWAY

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 1:5-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only (James 1:22).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Follow On"

Jonah was a prophet. His job was to deliver messages for God. God told him to tell the people of Nineveh that their city would be destroyed unless they would straighten up and do right.

Jonah didn't want to deliver that message. Nineveh was an enemy city. Jonah thought it would be fine to have it destroyed, so he ran away. Nineveh was northeast, and the prophet got on a ship going west.

God knew how to stop the runaway. A big storm came up, and the sailors were afraid their ship would sink. So Jonah confessed that he was running away from God. He thought that was why the storm came.

You know the rest of the story, don't you? The sailors threw Jonah overboard, and the storm stopped. A big fish swallowed Jonah and took him back to his own country. Then Jonah went straight to Nineveh and delivered God's message. The people stopped doing wrong. Their city was peaceful. It was a long time before enemy threatened Jonah's country again.

So what do we do when God tells us to do something? We do what He says, and quickly!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for guiding us always in the way that is right. Ask for wisdom to see that His way is better than our own selfish way. Ask for strength and courage to do what is right even when something else would be easier.

February 5

## CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 19:15-29

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

Why do you suppose Lot’s wife looked back? Curiosity, reluctance, indecision, a desire to see the evil punished? Perhaps she reasoned that if God went to all the trouble of sending angels to lead them out, surely He wasn’t going to do anything if she took one little peek.

The Bible is clear. Disobedience brings consequences. Consider the following: The sign says *No Parking*. “I’m just going to be a few minutes. I’ll be in and out before anyone notices.” Consequence: a parking citation.

The doctor says, “*Take this prescription until it’s all gone.*” You say, “I’m feeling a lot better. I can stop the medication now.” Consequence: backset.

The teacher assigns an exam. “It isn’t fair to have a test the day after a tournament game. I’ll just have to copy from the guy in front of me.” Result: detention.

“Mom said not to climb this tree. She’s a worry wart. I’ll be careful.” Consequence: a broken arm.

God’s Word says, *The wages of sin is death*. Do you take Him seriously?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** I thank You, Father, that Your Son paid the debt for my sins. Help me to be aware that I still may have to deal with the consequences of my actions. Give me strength to resist evil. In the name of Jesus, my Savior, I pray. Amen.

## THE MEASURE OF A PROPHET

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 18:15-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits (*Matthew 7:15, 16, New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Would Be True"

The first church we served was still suffering from the effects of a deluded group of people who years before had blindly followed a false prophet. This man, a powerful orator, had persuaded the people to sell out and move to Arkansas to await the coming of the Lord on a certain date. When the Lord didn't come at the appointed time, some of the disillusioned people filtered back to their old homes, but there was constant friction between those who returned and those who had never left, and the church suffered.

This certainly is not a unique happening. We wonder how people can be so easily misled. "Con men" tell us people are just waiting to be ripped off. Does carelessness or perhaps laziness play a part? It's much easier to take a minister's word for it than to check his preaching against God's Word.

Recently a preacher applied for a church and was asked, "How do we know you will be preaching the right doctrine?"

"It's your responsibility to study God's Word and know if my preaching conforms to what it says," he replied.

Jesus told the Jews if He did not do the works of the Father, they should not believe Him, but if He did, they should know that the Father is in Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your written Word. Help us not to be misled by false teachers or to be caught napping when false doctrine arises. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

February 7

## LOVING DISCIPLINE

**SCRIPTURE:** Lamentations 3:31-39

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives (Hebrews 12:6, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Change My Heart, O God"

I feel very fortunate to have been blessed with Christian parents. When it was very apparent that I must be punished for disobeying, my father would administer the punishment, then gently take me on his lap and weep with me. He would assure me of his love and let me know that it grieved him to have to discipline me. Knowing how much he loved me and feeling hesitant to disappoint him served often to keep me from disobedience.

Like little children who question whether discipline is for their own good, adults tend to question God when chastisement comes. Why is it so difficult for us to grasp that God is deeply grieved when we are disobedient, that it pains Him to have to administer discipline?

In retrospect, we sometimes recognize how God's discipline has worked for our good. Hebrews 12:11 tells us, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful, yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (*New American Standard Bible*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Most gracious Lord, we are so thankful that You are in complete control. We are grateful that You love us enough to discipline us when we are disobedient. We seek Your forgiveness and pray that the adversities that come will work to strengthen our faith and our obedience. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

## **IDOLS WILL BE BROKEN TO PIECES**

**SCRIPTURE:** Micah 1:1-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God . . . (Exodus 20:5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty"

It seems to be so easy to lose our focus, and when we do that, we lose a lot more.

The world that God has given us to live in is quite a splendid place. The minds that we have, our creative capacities (like Him, in His image), are remarkable. Unless we keep our focus on the Maker, we can really be "taken" with the product.

"I just don't think that I could live without football." "If my friend moves, there is nothing left for me." "We're going to lose our house. It's the end of the world." "I love this feeling I get. I'll do anything I have to do to get the money to support what it costs to keep getting the feeling." "I'm like a king when I know that I have the best car in sight. Keep your hands off."

Idolatry! And every idol will be broken to pieces. If we invest our first affections in any thing or person, rather than God, that's what it is, an idol. All of that has an end, but the God who had no beginning has no end, either. I'll trust Him!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Forgive us, Father, for lapses in our sense of what is right and Who is first. We will listen to the warnings of Your messenger, Micah, and we will use Your day, Sunday, as a reminder to seek first the kingdom, and You, the King. Amen.

**February 9**

## **COMPASSION THAT DOES NOT FAIL**

**SCRIPTURE:** Exodus 34:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth (Psalm 86:15, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Just as I Am”

What mother can resist the outstretched arms of a little child who wants assurance that, even though he has disobeyed and been punished, his mother still loves him? It is easy to show compassion in such circumstances. It is not so easy when an adult child repeatedly rejects his parents and finally becomes a hardened criminal. Even though the parent may still love the child, he may find it hard to feel compassion for him.

God patiently showed compassion to His rebellious children time and time again—even when they broke every law He gave them and deliberately turned away from Him to follow false gods.

Like David, the psalmist, we are awed and humbled by God’s great patience with us and His willingness to forgive us over and over for our weaknesses and willful disobedience.

Even though the consequences of our sins may not be taken away, it is reassuring to know that God will forgive us if we are truly repentant and turn to Him.

However, verses six and seven of today’s Scripture that speak of God’s compassion also warn us of the consequences of our sin and unrepentant behavior.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, we realize that we are undeserving of Your great love and compassion. Thank You for repeatedly forgiving us and for extending Your patience toward us. Help us as we strive to be better servants. We pray in Your Son’s name, amen.

## RECIPE FOR DISCOURAGEMENT

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 19:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5, 6, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "It Is Well with My Soul"

Have you ever found yourself thinking, "If I had seen God's miraculous intervention as many times as those Israelites, I certainly wouldn't have doubted that God could give the land occupied by giants into their hands."

How do you feel when a program you've worked hard to implement in the church hits a road block? Or when an attendance drive or a financial goal that your church has set and worked hard to achieve falls short of the mark? Or when an elder you've loved and respected falls from grace? Or when someone starts an ugly rumor about you? Or when you've made a financial sacrifice for the ministry of your church and you're faced with a stack of unpaid bills?

I wonder how today's Scripture might have been written if Elijah had refused to run when Jezebel threatened his life. Let us remind ourselves that God is in control of the universe and He is able to deliver us!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, we are sometimes embarrassed and ashamed when doubts creep in and we fail to trust You for deliverance. Please forgive our weaknesses and help us to trust You. Help us to rely on You, dear Father. Take away the discouragement in our lives and give us a confidence to always turn to You. In the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen.



February 11

## GOD'S PERFECT PERSPECTIVE

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 4:6-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "In His Time"

Don't you just love it when you're starting a project and everybody wants to tell you how to do it? No matter that their perspective, and perhaps their concept of the purpose of the project is different from yours, they are positive that their idea is best.

Jonah thought he had a lot of good reasons for not going to Nineveh. The people might not take kindly to his prophecy and might put him to death. Besides, it probably was a big waste of time. They probably were too far gone to be reached with God's message. Even if by some slim chance they did listen, Jonah didn't feel they were "his kind." Jonah may have felt, "We're God's chosen people, and He's even warned us against associating with the heathen." But Jonah's perspective and God's were not the same.

Though I hate to admit it, I sometimes find myself arguing with God. Maybe "reasoning" is a better word. I just try to point out to God why He should let my friends be cured of cancer or obtain a certain job, or conceive the child they so deeply desire. It is then that I must remind myself that His perspective is perfect and that He makes all things beautiful in His time.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our loving Lord, please forgive us when we tend to question You. Help us to accept Your will and to realize that someday we'll understand. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## **FORGIVENESS FOR THE PAST AND FAITH FOR THE FUTURE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 50:15-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20 *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

In his book, *A Nation of Victims*, Charles Sykes writes, "Portraying oneself as a victim has become an attractive pastime." He notes that many link themselves to some perceived victimization.

If there ever was a person who could claim victimization, it was Joseph. His father poisoned relationships in the family by showing favoritism. His brothers, hating him enough to kill, sold him into slavery.

The amazing thing about Joseph was that he never succumbed to bitterness. When the power to exact revenge was finally his, he refused to use it.

It is very easy for us to become slaves of the past. We expend great energy in nurturing our hatreds, in cultivating our resentments, and in planning our revenge. We can learn much from Joseph who left retribution to God and rejoiced in what God was accomplishing, even through flawed people.

Not only did Joseph look to the past with forgiveness, but he looked to the future with faith. He commanded that his body be embalmed and carried to the promised land.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, help us to be like Joseph who was not scarred by the deeds of those who harmed him. Help us to look toward the future and to delight in what You will bring to pass. Amen.

February 13

## OUR DAILY BREAD

**SCRIPTURE:** Exodus: 16:9-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat (Exodus 16:15, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "In Thanksgiving Let Us Praise Him"

Someone has calculated that on the average, each American will eat eighty thousand pounds of food during his/her lifetime.

*If you would know me, know my food.*

The eating habits of people teach us about them. Those who study culture study eating patterns for keys into such things as hierarchy and social distinctions. One such writer observes, "No social activity is more foundational and fundamental than the gathering, preparation, and consumption of food."

The Jewish people took great pride in a most unusual food, the "bread from heaven" which God gave their ancestors during their journey through the barrenness of Sinai. Jesus touched on this when He described himself as the bread of God "who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33, *New International Version*).

*If you would know me, know my food.*

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died, but here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die" (John 6:48-50, *New International Version*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You for providing my daily bread. Help me to remember that I do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from Your mouth. In the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

## REJOICING IN THE GOD OF CREATION

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 104:10-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work (Psalm 104:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "For the Beauty of the Earth"

Seventy percent of the earth's surface is covered by water. It is estimated that the earth is covered by 326 million cubic miles of water, most of it in the oceans. Nothing is more common and more extraordinary than water. Water can absorb heat without great increase in its own temperature. Because it expands when it freezes, frozen water floats. Scientists tell us that if it did not expand and float, ice would build up gradually from the ocean floor and eventually cover our planet with a solid glacial mass that would extinguish life as we know it.

The psalmist did not have the instruments to calculate such things, but he was awed by the power of God as seen in the cycles and the intricate design of the natural world. He was particularly fascinated by the waters that cover the earth like a garment (Psalm 104:6). He reflected on God in the storm, the spring, and the stream and all the plants and animals that are supported by them. He noted that they are all part of the wonder of God's provision for man, making possible grass for his cattle, plants for his field, and food for his table.

Reflect on God's hand today whenever you encounter water as you cross a stream on the way to school or work, as you wash your hands or your dishes, as you water your household plants, as you feel the rain, and as you quench your thirst.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, give me eyes to see You in Your mighty works. Help me to rejoice in Your creation. Amen.

## GOD LIVES WITH US

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 132:11-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Jesus answered . . . If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (John 14:23).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "He Leadeth Me"

In our Scripture we see three parts. First is a promise to David. People of his family will rule forever if they keep God's covenant (vv. 11, 12). Second is a promise that God will be in Zion, supplying the needs of the people and giving them salvation and joy (vv. 13-16). Third is another promise about David and his people. Their power will bud and grow, and their enemies will be defeated (vv. 17, 19).

Zion means Jerusalem, but Zion also means the church. God is present now in thousands of churches round the world (vv. 13, 14). He supplies the needs of their people (v. 15). He gives them salvation and joy (v. 16). The strength of the church keeps growing, and its enemies will be defeated (vv. 17, 18).

Long after Israel first sang this song, Jesus was born in the family of David. He is the one who rules forever. He lives in Heaven above and in His church on earth. His power is growing with the growth of the church. His enemies may seem to have the upper hand sometimes, but finally they will lose. Jesus will bring salvation and joy to His people forever. Our part now is to keep His covenant, to do what He wants us to do.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank the Lord for being among His people in the Church. Think of the work your church is doing now. Ask God to bless and help it so it will be successful. Think about your part in the work of the church, and promise to do your best.

## THE CONSTANCY OF GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 145:11-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made (Psalm 145:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Great is Thy Faithfulness"

I am fascinated by navigation. I remember crewing on a yacht crossing the Mediterranean toward Sicily. Ominous flames belched forth from Mount Etna high above us. As we neared the coast of Sicily the skipper pointed out the light-houses by which he could get our bearings. Each lighthouse had a characteristic signature, a pattern of light and darkness that was recorded on the sea charts we carried. By means of these fixed points we were able to know our location.

Ancient mariners had none of these conveniences, yet they often explored and settled vast areas of the sea. The Polyne-sians, for example, populated islands in a 12,000 square mile area from Easter Island to Hawaii and New Zealand. They became so sensitive to the sea and its wave patterns that they could crouch in the bow of a canoe, feel the sea, and predict the location of islands up to 100 miles away.

What are the constants by which you chart your life? There was no question in the mind of the writer of Psalm 145 concerning the constancy, the sovereignty, the providence, the love, and the majesty of God. These are truths to steer our lives by.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Compassionate Lord, the works of Your hand declares Your glory, splendor, and majesty. Thank You for Your promises, Your commands, Your protection, and Your righteousness. Amen.

## NO PAIN, NO GAIN

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Timothy 2:3-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Onward Christian Soldiers”

Singleminded endurance seems often to be the key to success. William Lloyd Garrison hated slavery with a passion. He published an abolitionist paper called *The Liberator*. When he ran out of newsprint he sold his bed and slept on the floor to buy paper to publish his attacks on the evils of slavery. His tombstone reads, “I am in earnest . . . I will not retreat a single step, and I will be heard.”

We seem to live in a time of weak loyalties and conditional commitments. Fanuel Tjingaete seemed to point out our weakness when he said, “A winner makes commitments; a loser makes promises.”

Mark Wellman made a commitment to climb the 2,200 foot vertical face of Half Dome in Yosemite National Park—in six inch segments. Paralyzed from the waist down, Mark pulled himself up the sheer face of the mountain with a pull-bar device. Over 4,500 exertions of his strength were necessary for the conquest of the mountain.

Feats of heroism, endurance, and perseverance are so common in athletics that we take them for granted. Paul suggests that we learn from athletes and soldiers the principle of endurance and that we apply it in our spiritual lives.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, help us to deepen our commitment to the things of Your kingdom. Help us not to be distracted by the false values and false loyalties of this world. Help us to be faithful whatever the challenges and difficulties of this day. Amen.



## CARING FOR THOSE IN NEED

**SCRIPTURE:** Ruth 1:8-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her (Ruth 1:14, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Make Me a Blessing"

I've never met a woman with the name of Orpah. Have you? I meet Ruths almost daily, but Orpahs, never. Some scholars suggest Orpah's name means "stiff-necked." *Ruth* means "friend" or "companion."

Their names, ironically, seem to suggest their natures. Both women professed loyalty to Naomi, their mother-in-law, but only Ruth put her loyalty into fully committed action.

The book of Ruth is about bonding. Perhaps that is why it is so frequently quoted at weddings.

We generally focus on Ruth's constancy and faithfulness to her mother-in-law, Naomi. But today it is well for us to highlight Naomi's care for the welfare of the younger women. Naomi lived during the time of the judges, a time when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). But she was not infected with the disease of self-centeredness. Though she most certainly was in need of companionship and loving support as she set out on her journey, Naomi's thoughts were on the welfare of the young women. She gave them face-saving reasons for remaining with their own people.

Naomi's name means "the pleasant one." No wonder Ruth found it so easy to be her friend. Those who give love, generally receive it in return.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, help me to be considerate of the needs and feelings of others. Help me to bond with others in order that the others and I may bond with You. Amen.

February 19

## FACING THE CHALLENGE OF TODAY

**SCRIPTURE:** Ruth 1:19—2:7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want (Psalm 23:1).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Faith Is the Victory!"

Every adult has known what it is to face both joy and sorrow, as well as gain and loss. Life gives us no guarantee that we will always prosper and many a person has known serious privation at some time in life. Naomi and Ruth returned from Moab impoverished. Each day's food presented a new challenge but they would not go hungry as long as Ruth could work. It was harvest season in Judah and there was grain to be had for those who would put forth the effort to glean the fields behind the harvesters. Gleaning is hard work, but Ruth was willing to face and meet this challenge.

The determination to face and overcome adversity is the stuff of which heroes are made. We may look with envy on those who seem to have had the "luck" to get ahead but it would be foolish to sit around and wait for our "luck" to come along. Be sure it won't. And be glad that life is not a matter of "luck." The secret for facing adversity is found in the faith that God is with us and will help us to overcome. It is faith that provides the courage and grit that helps us to overcome the adversity and hardship that we encounter in living.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, I thank You for the promise that You are with me. I pray for the leadership of Your Spirit as I face the challenges and opportunities of this day. Amen.

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February 19-25. **Henry E. Webb** is a minister and retired college professor. He and his wife, Emerald, reside in Johnson City, Tennessee, where they continue in service to Christ and His church.

## THE TREASURE OF FRIENDSHIP

**SCRIPTURE:** Ruth 2:13-23

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same? (Matthew 5:46).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Reach Out And Touch"

Marvelous things can happen when we least expect them. A young Moabite woman enters a field near Bethlehem to glean barley for daily food and she finds congenial and protective laborers who take her into their care. She must have been apprehensive among these strangers but soon she was made to feel welcome and secure by new and supporting friends.

It is important for us to be surrounded by a network of friends and loved ones. It provides us with the personal confidence and security without which we could not long survive. There is no poverty to compare with the lack of faithful friends.

If we receive much from our circle of friends (and we do!), it is important that we GIVE much. The world in which we live is full of lonely, hurting people. It is a privilege to supply a personal need and fill a void in the life of another person. Opportunities for this kind of ministry come to us. We need only to be sensitive and aware of the plight of some person who is lonely or insecure. Let's not miss the opportunity to say a kind word or offer an encouraging compliment that might bring a ray of sunshine into a gloomy and weary life. Jesus was a friend to the friendless. You and I can be a friend, too.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, open my eyes that I might see those around me who are lonely, hurting, or afraid. Give me the wisdom to speak a note of joy to someone today. In the name of Jesus, amen.

February 21

## MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

**SCRIPTURE:** Ruth 3:1-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you (Matthew 7:7).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Open My Eyes That I May See"

Initiative is what it is called. It is that quality which enables some people to visualize the possibilities in a given situation and then take steps to make these possibilities become realities. Is this quality a gift, or is it something that anybody can develop by exercising a little imagination and creative thought?

Some opportunities just happen; others are created. We have no influence over the former, but the possibilities of the latter are fantastic. Naomi's ingenuity created a great future for Ruth. All would have been missed if Naomi had failed to exercise some initiative.

What are the possibilities in your situation? Can you make your life, or somebody else's life, happier or more useful by initiating some change? Have you ever taken a few moments to reflect on the possibilities to be found in your own life? God surrounds us with opportunities. He leaves it up to us to seize upon them to improve our quality of life. It is a wise saying that tells us to "Pray as if everything depends upon God; work as though everything depends upon us." God blessed Naomi's initiative. He will bless our initiative, too. Life can be better. Let's make it so!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** For the many opportunities that surround me, I give thanks, dear Father. Help me to see and to seize the possibilities for good that are within my grasp today. Amen.

## THE MINISTRY OF BARNABAS

**SCRIPTURE:** Ruth 3:14-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Help Somebody Today"

"It was just a little gift, but it meant so much!" Ruth might have said something like that about the small amount of grain she carried in her apron that day when she returned to Naomi. Seldom is the real value of a gift related to its monetary value. A child may work to create an item that he proudly presents to his mother—because he loves her. Tears of joy fill the mother's eyes, not because of the market value of the small item but because she knows that it represents his love for her. A small token makes all of the work and sacrifice of motherhood worthwhile and encourages the mother to greater maternal devotion.

Every one needs encouragement. Psychologists recognize it as one of our basic human needs. On the other hand, to be the victim of discouragement is to be caught in a web of depression that can destroy a person.

There is a ministry every Christian can perform. It is the ministry of Barnabas who was called the "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36, *New International Version*). The only qualification for this ministry is the willingness to speak a positive word that helps to lift the load of one who struggles. The costs of such service are minimal: just a little thoughtfulness. The rewards are enormous. Try it today!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, help me to be sensitive to others. Give me the wisdom and grace to speak a word that will lift their burdens and brighten their day. In the name of Jesus, my Lord. Amen.

**February 23**

## **RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ruth 4:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets (Matthew 7:12).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Would Be True"

Today's text shows a custom that is strange to our ways. The land was (and still is) of crucial importance to Hebrew people. To insure that land remained within the family the law provided that the nearest blood relative had the first right to purchase land. Naomi was selling land that had belonged to her deceased husband. The blood relatives declined to exercise their right of purchase, leaving Boaz in a position to buy this land and with it Ruth's interest as Naomi's daughter-in-law.

Boaz had respect for the rights of others. How different this is from much of what we see today where the concern of many is only with their own rights. Our society's preoccupation with the rights of individuals has obscured the important fact that society also has rights. When we lose respect for the rights of others our own rights are not respected.

Life is like a mirror. It gives back to us what we put into it. Paul touches this principle when he reminds us that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). If we are respectful of others, if we do things that are right and kind and good, these qualities of respect and kindness will find their way back into our own lives. Somehow the Golden Rule works both ways.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, I thank You for the many kindnesses I have received. Help me always to be respectful of the rights and feelings of those around me. In Jesus' name, amen.

## RESPECT FOR THE RIGHT WAYS

**SCRIPTURE:** Ruth 4:7-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men (Romans 12:17).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee"

The Scripture calls our attention to another custom that is strange to us. In a day when the ability to write was not common and writing materials were scarce, it was customary to seal contracts by the exchange of some object. (This is still the case with the exchange of a ring in marriage contracts). The exchange of a sandal in the presence of witnesses sealed the sale of land.

We should not miss the significance of the fact that Boaz carried out this transaction in the right way. We might be tempted to say that this strange custom was only "a tradition." The tendency in our day is to dismiss the ordered ways of society as meaningless forms and "do it my way." How often have we heard somebody refer to the marriage contract as "a mere scrap of paper." Dreadful havoc generally comes to those who so easily dismiss the commitment involved in contracts that bind persons in common enterprise. We are surrounded by a suffering caused by contempt for doing things correctly.

Satan constantly tempts us to take "short cuts" as we go through life. Whatever we do we are usually faced with a right way (which usually requires a little more of us), and a quick, easier short-cut (which often demands a little cheating). To live for Jesus means to do things the right way and to live honestly and with integrity at all times and in every place.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, help me to conduct myself today in a manner that will not bring reproach upon the Lord whom I seek to serve. I pray this prayer in the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**February 25**

## **GOD'S GIFT OF FAMILY**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 128:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Exodus 20:12).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "The Family of God"

The story of Ruth and Boaz is significant not only because it is a beautiful story of love but also because these two became the great grandparents of David and ancestors of Jesus. They shared the hope of having children, which they viewed as one of God's choicest blessings (Ruth 4:11, 12). Psalm 128 tells us that those who fear God and walk in His ways will be blessed. Ruth and Boaz knew this.

God blesses the family of those who fear Him. Family joy does not imply that there are no problems or challenges in family life. The most profound joys in life are those found within the circle of the family. Thank God for your family, and also that you are part of God's family.

Conditions in our society have placed the traditional family in great peril. Stress on family relationships today are often more than one can bear. Tragic breakdowns occur and there is much hurting. As Christians, we need to do all that we can to strengthen the family—ours and others. We also need to be sympathetic to the suffering of those who are victims of family breakdowns. Love, friendship and understanding are still the balm that heals a broken heart. This healing is ours to give.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Lord, for the family I have shared. Thank You for the close and precious relationships my family has provided. Help me to show my gratitude often and in many ways. In the name of Jesus, my Savior, I pray. Amen.



## BEYOND THE LAW

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 12:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day (Matthew 12:8).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Once for All"

Have you ever sat down to play a board game with a small child? Just explaining the rules can take longer than playing the game, especially when the game is somewhat advanced for the child's learning level. During the teaching process you may find yourself being remarkably lenient as you play. You, in fact, show a little grace to your student.

Over time, the more the game is played the less necessary it is to rely on the rules. Rather, a new level of play is discovered; one where strategy and understanding lead to an almost instinctive level of play.

As Christians, we know that our Great Teacher has showered us with a grace so pure and powerful that despite our many failings we have been granted the gift of eternal life. We can win the game of life, not because we know and follow all the rules, but because our God sees our hearts and our intents. We have been given rules; we have also been given grace. God teaches us, His children, just as we might teach our own. He has high expectations that we will learn to do right, yet sees the purity of our hearts when we fail, and blankets us with His wonderful grace.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, I lift my heart to sing of Your grace. I praise Your holiness. I know I am who I am because of Your grace and forgiveness. Thank You for giving me many chances to find my way. Shelter me in Your abiding grace. Amen.

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February 26-March 3. **Kelli Wilmoth Bell** is a Christian writer living in Cincinnati, Ohio. She and her husband, Todd, are parents to a son, Griffith, and twin girls, Chloe and Cleo.

**February 27**

## **A DAY OF HONOR**

**SCRIPTURE:** Exodus 20:7-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Exodus 20:11).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O Day of Rest and Gladness"

In our society we set aside many holidays to honor many people. We have Mother's Day, Father's Day, Secretaries' Day, Grandparents' Day—each day helping us to remember a person who is important to us. There are days to help us remember special loved ones. We have set aside Labor Day for workers and Veterans Day and Memorial Day to honor and remember the price others have paid in war to give us the freedoms we enjoy. We know that by setting aside a day on our calendar and marking it a holiday we are more likely to stop and reflect on those people and events. We will stop what we are doing, if only for a moment, and honor those to whom we give importance.

That is what God has asked us to do each Lord's day. He wants us to take time to honor Him and the day He has called Holy. Once a week He has given us a very special "holiday;" a day that belongs to Him. He asks us, each Lord's Day, to stop and reflect upon the God of creation and the power of His gift of salvation. We stop, we remember, and we are refreshed by His presence. We are drawn closer to Him as we remember who He is and what our God has done and continues to do throughout eternity.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, who loves us, we pause and reflect upon Your greatness. Thank You for giving us a special day to remember You each week. We offer You our praise and love. Amen.

## GRANTING OUR NEEDS

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Samuel 21:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them (Psalms 22:4).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Trust in the Lord"

As babies we enter this world fully dependent on someone. We need love, food, shelter, and constant care. When we cry because we are hungry, thirsty, cold or lonely and our needs are met, we begin to develop a sense of trust in our caregiver. We learn to love the one we need for survival.

We learn that our God is a parent who is concerned about His children. He cares about our spiritual development and physical well being. He cares if we are hungry, or cold, or lonely. Like a tender, loving parent, our God is never farther than our cry. He is always there ready to help us.

God will see that we have all that we need. He may not grant us the luxuries of life, and He may not keep us free from pain, yet He will lead us, love us, and show us the best way to live a full, growing life in Him.

Just as God cared for David and his men, feeding them holy bread when they were hungry, so also will He care for us. Through our service to Him we show Him how we grow to trust in Him. As Christians we ask Him to lead us and to fulfill us, giving us purpose, direction, and unconditional love. He does. He goes beyond our understanding and teaches us just how a good parent cares for his young.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Father God, we praise You and cling to You trusting and knowing that You are a God who cares about all our needs. Teach us to accept Your love. In the name of Jesus, I pray, amen.

February 29

## FRUIT OR WEED

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matthew 13:43).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"

I'm not much of a gardener, but I'd like to be one. What a joy for the backyard gardener to see the seeds he planted mature! Beautiful, red tomatoes hanging on the vines, plants flowering into green beans and berries ripening.

Farmers must feel the same pride and joy as they look out over their acres of wheat, soy beans, corn or other crops. How enormous the work to produce a fruitful, weed-free crop!

Jesus tells us about a crop that had been deliberately sabotaged with weeds. Rather than risk injuring the crop by removing the weeds, the farmer decided to wait until the time of harvest to sort the weeds from the productive growth. He would then burn the weeds and save the fruit of his harvest.

Christians are Christ's harvest fruit. Basking in His light, we grow into the best we can be, producing good works for our God. Yet, around us are those who have not found the Creator. They are the weeds growing along with us. The weeds belong to the devil. The true miracle of God's garden is that we can choose what kind of plant we will be. Will we bear good fruit or will we be weeds trying to choke out righteousness? Will we be carried home to live with our Lord or be burned as the wicked?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord God, praise unto You for giving us the freedom of choice, allowing us to choose our eternal destination. We thank You for watching over us as we mature in our service to You. Thank You for carrying us home to live with You. Amen.

## This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

## Psalm 150

Praise the Lord!  
Praise God in His sanctuary;  
Praise Him in His mighty expanse.  
Praise Him for His mighty deeds;  
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness.

Praise Him with trumpet sound;  
Praise Him with harp and lyre.  
Praise Him with timbrel and dancing;  
Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.  
Praise Him with loud cymbals;  
Praise Him with resounding cymbals.  
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.  
Praise the Lord!

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# DEVOTIONS

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## March

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photo by H. Armstrong Roberts

**March 1**

## **THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD**

**SCRIPTURE:** Joel 3:13-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel (Joel 3:16).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Jerusalem the Golden"

Many families have a designated leader, someone who is the source of strength. Often no conscious effort has been made to decide just who this leader will be, it is just a recognized fact, an obvious choice. Sometimes there is no such leader and the family cannot work nor interact smoothly with one another.

A good leader is an essential part of our society whether in personal relations or in society at large. Often, just remembering a leader who has stood firm for what is right can help us to know how we should act. From presidents and their wives to teachers, bosses, family members or friends, we each have experienced the power of proper leadership in our lives.

Christians have a leader whose strength, power and righteousness are more than sufficient to solve our problems. We can seek Him and cling to Him. Just as He promised to deliver the children of Israel from their oppressors, He has promised to deliver us from evil, taking us to live with Him for eternity, guiding and comforting us in this life.

Our Jerusalem, God's city of eternity, awaits us. Our leader, God, shows us the way, making our lives run more joyfully, hopefully, and powerfully than we ever thought possible.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Father, we thank You for leading us in Your paths of righteousness. We humble ourselves in Your presence knowing that You are our Great Redeemer. Help us to be Your followers, growing to become Your leaders in the world today. Praise unto You, amen.



## DOING GOOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 6: 1-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "To the Work!"

Have you ever heard the saying, "Blood is thicker than water?" We use this phrase to mean that family members are more important to us than are our other friends. We recognize a special bond between relatives—a bond of shared past and heritage, as well as a biological and genetic relationship. Parents feel this strong bond grow daily as they nurture their children.

The Christian family also shares a unique relationship among its members. We are all family members sealed with the blood and the grace of Jesus Christ.

God expects His children to do His work. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the grieving, teach the way to salvation, and share the love of our Father, God. The Christian family should be one home that others can turn to and know that they are accepted, cared for, and loved. God expects us to care for all of His people. He also expects us to go even further with our Christian brothers and sisters. We should treat them with love, recognizing our shared heritage. Let us care for all of God's children but let us never forget the bond that ties Christians together in the family of God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, thank You for giving me the family to whom I was born. Thank You also for my family of Christians throughout the world, a family to whom I can always turn for help and guidance. Help me to be the kind of family member You would have me to be, always caring and showing Your abiding love. Amen.

**March 3**

## **HAVE YOUR EYES AND EARS BEEN CHECKED?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 13:10-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear (Matthew 13:16).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “The Heavenly Vision”

Many of us have seen the hearing aid commercial showing a man nearly run over by a truck because he cannot hear. Not only can this man no longer hear conversations, his very life is in danger. If it were not for the help of his hearing friends, what would he do?

We often observe this scene acted out on a spiritual level. Sometimes one of us is the man who cannot hear clearly. Then there are those Christians who are ready to help us find our way. Sometimes one of us is the servant of God. We hear the Lord and do His will, sharing with everyone around us God’s eternal salvation.

God has given us a spiritual guide living within us. We have been given spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear the truths of the way to eternal life. We must be a guide for those unable to see the way of the Lord. We must be serving as the hearing aid for those unable to hear the Word of the Lord. God has given us special gifts to serve Him in His kingdom and to help save all the people of the earth—God’s beloved creations.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, I humble myself in Your presence, seeking Your will in my life. May I always listen and hear You when You call. Help me to have the keen ears of Your people serving You to the end. I rest in Your greatness knowing Your grace blankets me. In the name of Jesus, amen.

## READ THE ROAD SIGNS

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 16:5-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Know Whom I Have Believed”

This is a test—one that most of us pass each day without even thinking about it. In your imagination, picture a large, red, eight-sided sign. Every day we read road signs or some other instruction. Passing this everyday test is vital for traveling the roadways safely.

Jesus used a teachable moment with his disciples, illustrating with bread and yeast. After initial confusion, His followers understood that Jesus was posting a warning sign for them as they proceeded down the roadway of faith. The influence of the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ teaching would always detour them from trust in the Son and the Word of God. The Pharisees’ teaching would always put a premium upon tradition and ritualistic religion. The Sadducees trusted in power and influence built upon wealth and political strength.

The Lord urges us to read the warning signs. Beware of the “yeast” of human power and man-made tradition. Proceed on the road of confidence with the evidence of a sacrificial and miraculous Savior!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Whenever I come to an intersection of spiritual decision this day, O Lord, I choose to aim my direction from the clear example of the life of Your Son, Christ Jesus, and the instructions mapped out in Your Word. Amen.

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March 4-10. **David Hargrave** is Senior Minister with the Fairfield Church of Christ in Fairfield, Ohio. He and his wife, Connie, have two children, Jill and Jonathan.

**March 5**

## **THE PULSE OF PERSONAL FAITH**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 16:13-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "He Is Lord"

George Gallup, Lou Harris and George Barna and their organizations have been among the many who have sought to identify and interpret widely held opinions in our society. Data gathered continues to indicate that most people in America lay claim to some degree of faith in God.

When Jesus led His disciples for a retreat near the area of Caesarea Philippi, He asked what at first sounds like a question for a public opinion poll. But He was not seeking to find out if He was riding the crest of the wave of popularity. Christ knew that the popular culture is influenced by the whim of fashion, the pressure of politics, and the call of convenience.

Jesus was more interested in getting His finger on the spiritual pulse of His disciples. He wanted to know if they had yet been convinced to the point of confidence that would result in their putting their lives on the line for him. When Peter voiced what we call the "Good Confession," the Savior pointed out that this life changing conviction comes not from public or personal opinion but from divine revelation.

Next time you see the published results from a popular poll, remember that Jesus still cares more about what you are personally declaring for Him with your lips and your lifestyle.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, I put my trust in You and I'm counting upon You today for the ultimate answers to my greatest questions. Amen.

## MATCHLESS MAJESTY

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 17:1-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Majesty”

Frontiersman Davy Crockett purportedly said, “Shoot first; ask questions later.” Often times, Peter, the apostle of Jesus, would “Shoot from the lip first; ask the Lord later.” On the mountain of transfiguration, Peter seemed to have a good idea. In that glorious moment he exclaimed, “Let’s fix a place for you, Jesus, along side one for Moses and one for Elijah.” However God had an infinitely better idea. There could be no peer to His dearly beloved Son, even in the great lawgiver or prophet. “This is my Son . . . Listen to Him!”

Peter was impressed and his ideas permanently altered. Even many years later, as he offered evidence for his conviction in preaching Christ Jesus, he wrote about the voice from “Majestic Glory” that he had heard on that mountain. “This is my Son . . .” (2 Peter 1:18, 19). He makes no mention later about tabernacles for Moses and Elijah!

Christ Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets. Moses could deliver God’s commandments about sacrifice for sin but only Jesus could become the perfect sacrifice for sin. Elijah represented the great prophets who heralded the coming of the Messiah but only Jesus would perfectly be “the way, the truth, and the life.” “Listen to Him!”

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Help me to learn from faithful teachers and to utilize effective methods, Lord. But above all else and before all others, I will fix my gaze upon Jesus and listen intently to His Word. Amen.

March 7

## CHRIST CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 17:14-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** “‘If you can?’” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:23, 24, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus”

Recorded history and personal experience confirm the reliability of the adage, “After a mountaintop experience then comes the valley of service.” Jesus and the three disciples who had accompanied Him descended with glorious experiences from the Mount of transfiguration only to find a clamoring crowd, suspicious scribes, nine bewildered disciples, and a suffering boy.

Why were the disciples immobilized? Why was Jesus so distressed and forceful in His remarks about this situation? Why couldn’t the disciples heal this lad?

It wasn’t Satan’s power, the mischief of the scribes (Mark 9:14), nor the seriousness of the boy’s affliction that stood in the way of his healing. The failure that provoked the Master’s stern evaluation was the unbelief of the disciples themselves. But give them credit. In their time of failure and questioning, they went to the Lord to find out His answer.

Someone has said, when it comes to trusting God, we can go through life as one who expects to move mountains or who stumbles over molehills. The difference is not how much faith we have—even as little as a mustard seed will do. The dynamic comes from the right object of faith—Jesus!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Jesus, for reminding me that You can overcome the inadequacies of Your disciples. When I’m faced with obstacles, remind me to depend upon You, the irresistible force. Amen.

## CONSCIENTIOUS SUBJECTION

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 17:22-27

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God (Romans 13:1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "My Country 'Tis of Thee"

The taxpayer was stricken in conscience, so he mailed the following note to the Internal Revenue Service:

"Dear Sirs: My conscience bothered me. Here is the \$175.00 which I owe in back taxes." An added postscript read: "If my conscience still bothers me, I'll send in the rest."

In dealing with things in life as practical as the paying of taxes, our Lord sets an example for us in the matters of conscience. The temple tax was an annual assessment on all Jews twenty years of age and older. The irony, as Jesus points out to Peter, is that the temple authorities were in fact demanding taxes from the Messiah. As God's Son, Jesus was the Lord of the temple, and thus not obligated to such taxation.

But think about it: Jesus paid the tax, voluntarily, to avoid offending the religious and governmental leaders of the day. His actions speak volumes to our conscience as His disciples.

Our spiritual freedom and sonship in God's kingdom grant us tremendous personal liberty. However, we must not let this spiritual liberty be exercised in a flagrant, offensive manner that others in our society will not comprehend. Like our Lord, let us avoid offending those who do not understand our moral liberty.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Help me, Master, to seek a clear conscience by making right choices in exercising my spiritual freedom. So may I complement my testimony as Your disciple. Amen.

March 9

## TO BE HELD IN THE ARMS OF JESUS

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 18:1-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up (James 4:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “More Like the Master”

It was just a slip of the tongue. The deacon had been called upon to lead the congregation in prayer. As he worded his request about discipleship, a metaphor strayed slightly off course. I am sure my friend meant to use the word “footsteps,” but instead he prayed, “Lord, help us to walk in your *footlights*.” In reflection, I considered his “slip” a reminder to analyze my motives in requests to the Master. Do I want to follow in his “footsteps” and become a servant like Him, or do I seek the “footlights” where greatness of devotion can be staged?

With a little child in His arms, Jesus turned the inquiry of the disciples about power into a brief discourse revealing God’s heart for humble servants. Our text today shows that God’s heart *beats* for humble ones (verses 3-5); God’s heart *breaks* for humble ones (verses 6-9); God’s heart *beholds* humble ones (verse 10); and God’s heart *beseeches* humble ones (verses 12-14).

The sign on the wall could be applied to the differences between a “footlight” disciple and a “footsteps” disciple:

If you want to get UP, step DOWN.

If you want to be SEEN, get out of SIGHT.

If you want to be GREAT, forget YOURSELF.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Of the many things in life that I’ve asked of You in prayer, dear Savior, just now I seek to have You hold me close as Your little child, so I can learn to be a servant like You. Amen.



## A CALL FOR RECONCILIATION

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 18:15-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** All this is God's doing, for he has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ; and he has made us agents of the reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18, *Phillip's Translation*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O How He Loves You and Me"

In a talk with John Wesley, a man named John Oglethorpe said, "I never forgive." Mr. Wesley responded with an instructive insight, "Then, Sir, I hope that you never sin."

Because we are humans living in a fallen and sinful world, misunderstanding and conflict are inevitable. Different ideas and opinions about almost anything can arise to cause disagreement. As believers, we have responsibility to obey what we know is right. We also have responsibility to seek peace with someone when we know something is wrong! (Romans 14:19).

Our Master outlines a procedure to work for reconciliation among brothers. He wanted to accomplish more than just settle an argument. His purpose for loving confrontation between brothers is aimed at more than establishing fault or blame.

Christians frequently quote Matthew 18:20 to cite the promised presence of the Lord in our services, assemblies and times of prayer. We ought to observe, however, that the context of his remark is in keeping with His mission of promoting reconciliation and unity on earth. These have implications in heaven!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, help me to be an agent of Your peace, taking the initiative to bring reconciliation among believers and the blending of hearts in Your service. Amen.

**March 11**

## **RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE WORKPLACE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 24:10-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** It will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 24:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Others”

My father came to know the Lord in his middle years. He was not an articulate man. He never learned to talk “the language of Zion,” never fit in socially with the church folk, never ushered at the worship service, never taught a class.

He owned a welding shop and employed several men who stayed with him for more than twenty-five years until the business finally failed. Dad could have declared bankruptcy. He didn't. He struggled in his later years to pay off his debts, and, until he finally had to let them go, he paid his workers well and on time.

The church folk may never have looked deep enough to see his brand of righteousness but his employees did. My dad is ninety years old now and still hears from his former workers. Beneath his rough exterior and his inability to articulate his faith or verbally express affection or compassion, they saw, for all his faults, a righteous man—a man who took Deuteronomy 24:14 seriously and never took advantage of his hired men. And his actions were no doubt “regarded as righteous” in the sight of his Lord as well as in the sight of his men.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, make us keenly aware that You look not only on our actions at church, but especially at what we do and how we treat others during the week—especially those with whom we are in a position of advantage. Amen.

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March 11-17. **Wanda Trawick** serves as Director of Christian Education for the Watauga Avenue Presbyterian Church in Johnson City, Tennessee.

## A DROP IN THE BUCKET

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 5:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress (Isaiah 5:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "In Christ There Is No East or West"

Have you stopped watching the evening news, given up the daily newspaper? When the news from our neighborhoods and cities, as well as the nation and the world, becomes too stressful, we're tempted to do just that. Why? Because we feel overwhelmed and helpless.

A few years ago I became so depressed over the presence of war, famine, and natural disasters throughout the world that I could no longer see the use of supporting the family in the Philippines I was helping at the time. A wise counselor listened to my litany of hopelessness and asked me a question that silenced me. He said, "Well, what are you going to do—write that family and tell them your aid to them is just a drop in the bucket, so you're going to stop helping them?"

I can be at least a drop of righteousness in a bucket of distress, and so can we all. One family may seem insignificant in a world of billions of families, but to that one family, the help was very significant.

Let's be faithful and persistent with our "drops" and be open to what God can accomplish through them.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, deliver us from the feeling of hopelessness as we look on Your world so full of distress. Build our resolve to join together with our small drops of righteousness that will flow into a stream that can make a difference in a world of injustice and hunger. Amen.

✓ March 13

## MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 9:14-24

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? (Romans 9:20).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Am Thine, O Lord"

In the children's story, *Snow White*, Snow White's step-mother looked into her mirror one day and discovered she was no longer "fairest of them all," and she became enraged. Before we condemn her, however, we might turn that mirror on ourselves. Do we whine because our ears or noses are too big, our chins are receding, our bodybuild unfashionable? Are we envious of those whose physical appearance is more pleasing than ours, their talents more spectacular, their intellect quicker, their financial and social standing above ours?

Are we angry because some students make "A's" almost without trying, while we study hard for a "C"? Or because we work as hard as the athletes on the first string, but end up warming the bench? Do we play the "if only" game? If only God had made me this way or given me that. . . .

Playing the "if only" game is tempting but pointless, isn't it? What is the question we really need to ask?

The question is, *What will God have me do with what he has given to me or withheld from me? How do I fit into His kingdom?*

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O mighty God, we don't always understand why You made us as we are or put us where You have, but help us to remember that You are the potter and we are the clay. Help us simply to desire to fulfill the function for which You made us. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

## WANTED: JUDGEMENT OR VENGEANCE?

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 17:24-34

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "The Great Judgment Morning"

Our eight-year-old son, who had recently made a public profession of faith in Christ, was listening in rapt attention to our pastor who was preaching on judgment. The preacher built to the climax and thundered, "One day those who say they don't believe in hell are going to split hell wide open!"

The church echoed with "amens." I looked down at Sam. His eyes sparkled as though he had just watched his pastor hit a home run. Most in the congregation were smiling. I was stunned by those hearty "amens." *So let it be!* That's what "amen" means. And people were saying it with an unmistakable element of glee in their voices. No bitter tears. No agonizing prayer. Just, "Amen!"

Were there those in the congregation who were actually happy at the thought that those who made fun of our beliefs were going to "split hell wide open"?

I had a talk with Sam when we got home. That sparkle in his eyes worried me and I wanted him to know that Jesus once had tears in His eyes over a city full of people He knew were facing judgment, even though they would give Him reason to desire vengeance.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our prayer is that Christ's judgment of our lives will culminate in those hoped-for words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Our prayer for nonbelievers is that they will accept God's mercy freely given before they must face His judgment. Amen.

March 15

## COURTEOUS CURSES AND SUBTLE STUMBLING BLOCKS

**SCRIPTURE:** Leviticus 19:9-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind (Leviticus 19:14).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Take My Life, and Let It Be"

Like countless others, I was delighted when Catherine Marshall's novel, *Christy*, became a miniseries on network television. I cringed, as Christy did, at the treatment the classroom bullies gave the little mute girl in the one-room school. I wanted to "punch them out" in righteous indignation.

But that feeling might have been a bit hypocritical. I've never made fun of those who were physically or mentally handicapped—not even as a child in school. On the other hand, I've shunned them by the hundreds. Why? For the same reason many others do—fear of embarrassment. People tend to stare at those who are different. If I befriend them, I might be stared at, too. And, too often, I have no idea what to say to these people. Or I can't understand what they are saying. I am afraid of doing harm or making a fool of myself.

In other words, I am more concerned about myself than I am about those who are often lonely and left out because they are (at least to us) sometimes disturbingly different.

But is shunning not a subtle way of "cursing" or laying a "stumbling block?"

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father forgive us for our sins of omission and the unworthy motives that often lie behind them. Teach us that timidity and self-consciousness may cheat us of rich friendships with those the world calls "disabled." Amen.

## IF I WERE A RICH MAN

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 19:16-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:22).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "All for Jesus"

Have you ever watched a sweepstakes winner on TV and thought about how much good you could do with all that money?

A million dollars—what fun to think of all the needs you could fill, the churches and missions you could help, the hunger programs you could support, political policies you could help implement. You could, perhaps, build a shelter for the homeless in your community, fund a program for disadvantaged youth, give scholarships to hardworking students who lack money for tuition, fund a mission clinic, endow a Christian school, support missionaries around the world—so many possibilities it makes your head spin.

I like to fantasize about what I could do with all that money. It's so easy to make decisions about the use of riches when we don't actually possess them. But could we resist the temptation to depend on and cling to wealth if we actually had it? The hard question for most of us is not "What would I do with a million dollars?" but "How am I using the possessions I *do* have?"

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Forgive us, Father, for our quick condemnation of the rich young ruler. By the rest of the world's standards, most of us are at least comparatively rich. When You call on us to make hard decisions on the use of our time, talent, and money, help us say "yes" to Christ's demands. Amen.

**March 17**

## **IT'S NEVER TOO LATE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 21:28-32

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented and went (Matthew 21:29).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Wherever He Leads, I'll Go"

"Opportunity knocks but once." I don't hear that proverb as much as I used to—or perhaps I just don't pay as much attention to it as I once did. Although there may be unusual cases in which opportunity knocks but once, I've discovered through the years that our God indeed gives second chances—and often third or fourth ones.

We don't know why the first son in this parable said "no" to his father. Was he rebellious or just lazy? Or had he already made plans for the day—without consulting his father? Whatever the reason, he said, "I will not."

Now that's a scary realization—to know we have refused to do something God has asked us to do—for whatever reason that may have seemed good at the time. But is that cause for us to weep and wail and gnash our teeth in self-condemnation for the rest of our lives? Is that God's attitude toward us, or is it not our own mistaken one toward ourselves?

Who is commended in this parable? The one who later changed his mind and did what the God of second chances asked him to do.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, God, that You don't condemn us when we go our own way, but welcome us back when we change directions. If we missed the opportunity You gave us when we were in our twenties, help us take hold of it in our forties or fifties—or eighties. Amen.



## WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 22:34-40

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37, 38, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Love You, Lord”

I asked myself the question, “What does it mean to *really* love the Lord?” Contrary to my expectations, no words came pouring out, and as each day went along, I would go about my normal activities with little proddings that would cry out, “You know . . . If you *really* loved the Lord, you would show it right now by . . .” They were small actions which probably no one noticed, but for me, they represented significant choices I had to make.

I’ll admit it. I’m convicted. Though these commandments have been memorized for years, they cause me to wrestle and question just how I might live out my love for God in a deeper way. What are some of the ways that love could be expressed? For some, could it mean calling that person who really needs encouragement (even though the encourager himself might need some encouragement)? Making a God-directed change in your job as your friends question your sanity? Daring to stand alone? Forgiving when it’s humanly impossible? Trusting Him for every need? Allowing Him to bring you joy? Allowing Him to convict you and discipline you to greater growth?

What does loving the Lord *really* mean to you?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our Father, how easy it is to say that we love You. Please forgive us when our actions do not match our words. Amen.

March 19

## HOW DO YOU SPELL SUCCESS?

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 23:1-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:11, 12, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Make Me a Servant”

How do you spell success? Visibility? Recognition? A name in print? Leading workshops on the newest proven methods? People coming to you for advice?

How does Jesus spell success? S-e-r-v-a-n-t-h-o-o-d. The lowly tasks performed without recognition—or accolades. Pure motives behind labors of love. Peace and joy over a job well done, even if no one knows.

Quite a contrast to a society that cries out “*You deserve this!*” The truth is that if we got what we deserved, what we would actually be receiving is God’s judgment and wrath. Jesus didn’t deserve what He received. He didn’t deserve to die—but He did—modeling ultimate servanthood to the world.

Yet the world continues on—claiming false recognition as Jesus continues to love and serve. What a paradox that the Lord of all Heaven and earth should continue in this way! What a shock it will be when the world will someday see our servant model as He truly is!

How can we—if we *do* love Him with all our hearts—do any less than to try to follow His example? Do we even dare to think, “Servanthood is all right for Him—but not for me. My job is important.” Stop. Read Philippians 2:5-11.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord Jesus, please help us to remember all that You have done for us. Thank You, Lord! Amen.

## ARE YOU JUST A PRETTY PACKAGE?

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 23:13-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven (Matthew 7:21, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Jesus Is Lord Of All”

The bag of potatoes looked good. I got out enough for dinner and began peeling them. To my dismay, as soon as the outer peelings were removed, it became evident that these beautiful potatoes were rotting from the inside. They had fallen prey to the “Pretty Peeling but Putrefying Potato” syndrome.

The Pharisees had fallen prey to a similar malady—“The Perfect Package but Putrefying Piety” syndrome. Oh, they *looked* great and they played their religious roles well, but—open them up—and they were like open graves.

We recoil in disgust, yet, stop and think. It is all too easy to play the religious game. We may know all the right words, the right motions and the right looks. But are we wearing an outer layer of spirituality hoping that no one will notice that inside we are rotting away with bitterness, anger, or even fear?

What happens when that outer layer is peeled away? It hurts. There may be harmful things which we have allowed to remain. But after the pain comes the healing—if we allow it.

The Pharisees experienced pain when Jesus exposed them, but they quickly shut themselves up to form another layer of pretense piety—rotting away even further. But others went past the pain to allow Jesus to bring them true healing.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, may we make You Lord of our lives. Amen.

March 21

## TEARS OF REJECTION—TEARS OF JOY

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 23:29-39

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God (Luke 12:8, 9, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “For Those Tears I Died”

We picture Jesus in pain as He was nailed to the cross, or as He prayed in Gethsemane, but today's Scripture paints a description of another pain He endured—the pain of rejection.

When we see Jesus weeping over Jerusalem we see a heart that was breaking. It was not just a city bringing tears. It was *people*—people whom He loved even to the point of leaving his Heavenly home to die for them. As they rejected that love, heading willfully to their own destruction, He rose before them with open arms as He hung on the cross—and they turned away.

He must cry still—for even with the joy of the millions who have accepted Him throughout the years, others have made their choice and have gone their own way.

Are His tears for you? Is He still standing before you with open arms? Do you share His pain? Do you hurt when you see so many miss the joy in Christ and head toward destruction? And, if you do find yourself sharing in that pain, to what type of action will that lead you? Will you bury it or allow it to lead you to greater love and service for Him?

Tears *are* a good thing. When they lead us closer to Christ they become tears of joy.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, thank You for being willing to bear so much in order that we might have life. Amen.

## UNEXPECTED JOY OR UNSPEAKABLE GRIEF?

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 24:36-44

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Matthew 24:44, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending"

It's a typical scene.

The teacher explains, "I need to step out of the room for just a few minutes. I'm going to put a monitor in charge and I expect you to have this assignment completed when I return."

Whispers begin despite warnings. Instead of working on problems, those pencils are writing notes, being stuck in ears and noses, and used as drum sticks.

More warnings. More noise.

"Come on you guys! He's right outside the door!

"Yeah, right . . ."

When suddenly . . . Yikes! In walks the teacher! Judgment is pronounced. Those who obeyed received a reward; and those who didn't, an extra assignment. Those without that extra assignment retort, "Listen, we tried to warn you."

The world is our classroom and we, too, have been warned. Jesus has told us that He is coming back. We don't know when that will be. Judgment will be pronounced and rewards will be given. There will be no excuses.

When He comes back, what will you experience?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Jesus, thank You for Your promise that You will return. Often it seems so far away. Please forgive us and help us to wait for You. We praise Your name, amen.

March 23

## MONITORS OF LOVE

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 24:45-51

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “‘Are Ye Able,’ Said the Master”

Last night I read yesterday’s devotion to my two teenage sons to give it a “test run.”

They listened politely and then one responded immediately with a question.

“Who’s the monitor?”

“Come on, guys . . . you’re missing the point.”

“No . . . If Jesus is the Teacher, who is the monitor?”

“Okay. Listen to this . . .” I read today’s Scripture. “Now . . . who’s the monitor?”

We are. Jesus has told us that He is coming back and we have been given the responsibility to share that good news with others. Of course, it is not our place to write down names for judgment—but we *are* responsible for pointing the way. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: Which way are we pointing? Are we pointing to Jesus as the only way to salvation, or are we leading others to a path of destruction?

At this moment, ask yourself, “If I were to look at my Lord face to face right now, what would He have to say to me?” “Why haven’t you done what I’ve asked?” or, “Well done!”

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty God, we praise You for Your grace and mercy. Please forgive us when we keep Your gift to ourselves. Help us to share Your truth. We pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.

## IT COULD BE NOW

**SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 25:1-13**

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** “Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 22:12-13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “The King Is Coming!”

There is a growing expectancy. The Bridegroom is coming! The urgency to move forward has heightened. The Bridegroom is coming!

The talk of Christ’s return spurs a myriad of reactions—disbelief (as in the days of Noah), apathy (I really don’t think it will be soon), exultation (Yes!), or dread (Not yet, Lord.).

I find myself thinking of Heaven more and more. “Lord,” I hear myself saying, “I can’t wait. In fact, at times I actually feel homesick for Heaven. But . . . I’m worried about certain people. I haven’t really talked to them yet.”

“Then do it,” I hear Him say. “I am coming back—soon.”

The warnings have been given. The price has been paid. Jesus’ arms are still outstretched. If we ourselves have not run to His embrace, we need to do it, and do it now. If we have not made Him Lord, we need to do it and do it now. If we have not told our neighbors, we need to do it, and do it now. If we have not forgiven those who have hurt us, we need to do it and do it now. If we are not pointing to Jesus, the Way, for all the world to see, we need to do it, and do it now.

Jesus *is* coming back. It could be *now*.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, we praise You and look forward to that day when we shall meet You face to face. Amen.

**March 25**

## **READY AND WAITING**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 12:35-40

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Luke 12:40, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Only One Life to Offer”

During a couple periods in my life, I have been a student and a teacher at the same time. When that happens, it's amazing to me how differently I view both situations. One aspect in which the contrast is particularly important is homework. The student part of me might be wanting to let something slide, but the teacher part will say, “What if that's the basis for the whole class discussion?” So both the fear of punishment for being unprepared (the student's concern) and the desire to see the class succeed (the teacher's concern) motivate me to be prepared.

In our lives, we have to be aware that the things that God has given us to do must be done well and done right away. They can have both immediate and eternal consequences. When Jesus tells us to be ready and waiting for His return, it means more than simply being sure that we have accepted His salvation through baptism. We must be doing every day the things that identify us as His servants and that lead others to follow Him, too.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, help us to look forward to the time You will return, and until that time, help us to be continually doing the things that will please You and bring others to You. Amen.

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March 25-31. **Paul Friskney**, his wife, Ann, and children, Hannah and Ben, live in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he teaches English, Creative Writing and directs drama at Cincinnati Bible College.



## JUST STAY THERE

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 12:41-48

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows (Luke 12:47, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Trust and Obey"

I am the fifth of six children born in a preacher's family. On Sundays, my mother would get us ready one by one and send us into the living room to await the time for going to worship. She'd say, "Now just stay there and don't get dirty." I tried to follow her instructions, but as time wore on and other ideas suggested themselves, I would end up where I didn't belong doing things that left me far from clean. Then, I knew that I could expect something other than pleasure when Mom saw me.

As Christians, we have a responsibility in the message that Christ has entrusted to us. We must obey Him. He says, "Love one another." Is that the attitude that identifies our dealings with other Christians? He commands, "Be holy as I am holy." Are we striving to match our lives to His? He instructs, "Go into all the world." Do we have that perspective in our priorities, or do we have difficulty seeing beyond our own home or congregation? We are called to obey, and one day our Master will return to see how well we followed His instructions. Will we receive punishment or praise?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, let us continually measure our lives against the standard that You have set forth in Your Word. Don't let us be satisfied with the world's praise, but help us to seek Your will and follow it. Amen.

## ONE TO GROW FROM

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 13:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Living for Jesus”

I love planting things and watching them grow. It wasn't always this way. When I was growing up, my most frequent conflict with my father were at times when I didn't want to work in the garden. I'm not exactly sure what the difference is, now. I hope that part of the explanation is my maturity. Another part is the fact that now I have a sense of ownership for the things I plant. When I see flowers blooming in the spring because of bulbs I planted in the fall, I find both joy and pride in that experience.

If I can feel that sense of ownership when I've invested so little, it shouldn't surprise me when Christ has expectations from those of us in whom He has invested so much, from the creation through His crucifixion and right up to the present day. No wonder He is disappointed when He looks into our lives and sees no fruit of the Spirit growing, no other lives being won to Him, no growth taking place in our understanding and appreciation of Him and His Word. Are we willing to experience what it takes to grow in Him?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, remove from our lives the weeds that hold back our growth. Give us the resources we need and help us to build them into our lives that we might grow in the areas in which You expect and require growth. Make us more of what You want us to be. Amen.

## BOUND FREEDOM OR FREEDOM BOUND

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 13:10-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and so not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

An old oriental custom was to bind young girls' feet so they would remain small and delicate. However, this practice often led to women being unable to walk by the time they reached adulthood. Doesn't it seem crazy for them to be so concerned with maintaining a particular appearance that they would be willing to give up the use of the feet?

Jesus and the synagogue ruler had a similar difference in focus: *how* versus *what*. But before we are too quick to judge the ruler, we need to look into our own lives at the times when we become so caught up in how something is done that we forget to focus on what is being done. Every day, we face situations that call for us to determine which focus we shall have. Do we hear only music that doesn't suit our taste, or do we focus on the message that is being presented? Do we see people who do things differently from the way we would do them, or do we join them in accomplishing the necessary tasks? Do we identify with those who stood and criticized when Jesus acted, or with those who praised God for the miracle He performed?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, help us to concentrate on the liberating power You bring into our lives. So may we avoid being bound by sin, by appearances, or by our own pride or stubbornness. Amen.

**March 29**

## **BEHIND DOOR NUMBER ONE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 13:22-30

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to (Luke 13:24, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Work for the Night Is Coming”

My brother is seven years older than I am, and when we were younger, he would use that to his advantage in many ways. One thing he used to do was to shut me in the closet when he didn't want me in the room that we shared. If I questioned his right to treat me that way, he assured me that his ability to do it was all the right that he needed.

Sometimes we are tempted to question God's right to decide the basis upon which individuals can be saved or the time when opportunity ends for a particular individual. However, God not only created us but also provided the means of salvation through the gift of His only Son. The door to eternal life may be narrow, but it is now open. We must take advantage of the opportunity today because we don't have any way of knowing how long that opportunity will last. We must enter and lead others in as well. Soon there will be a definite separation leading to reward for some and punishment for others. The good things we've done and the accomplishments to our credit won't mean anything. The only thing that will matter is how well we know the Owner of the house and whether we entered through the door that He opened for us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, Thank You for Your great love that has provided for us a way to obtain eternal life. May every aspect of our lives be controlled by gratitude for Your gift. So may we accept it willingly and share it with others. Amen.

## WHO'S ON FIRST?

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 14:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer (2 Corinthians 5:16).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I'll Put Jesus First in My Life"

Pet causes—it seems as though everyone pushes them. People want you to give money to save the whales, and urge you not to eat tuna that's gathered through a process that endangers dolphins, and exhort you to recycle paper so that we can save the forests. Then there are the hundreds, maybe even thousands, of financial and research foundations fighting diseases that need cures or treatment. Among all these good (and not so good) causes vying for our time, energy, and money, it is all too easy to lose sight of the priorities that God wants us to have.

God calls us first of all to love and serve Him. Then He challenges us to pour our resources, our abilities, our very lives into the task of serving others and bringing them to Christ. We might be able to shake our heads over the Pharisees who would rescue an ox before they would allow Jesus to help a suffering man. But do we follow the same course? We must never let our society convince us that fighting the temporary evils of this life is more important than overcoming the eternal evil through the power of the eternal Good.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, may we so identify ourselves with You and Your Word that we may see all of life's situations and struggles from Your perspective. Help us to follow the leadership of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name, we pray. Amen.

**March 31**

## **WILL THE REAL SERVANT PLEASE SIT DOWN?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 14:7-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 14:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Surrender All”

Jesus is never reluctant to ask us to break the hold that our human way of thinking has on our minds and hearts. We desire recognition and power. He calls for us to choose seats out of the limelight, away from the honored guests.

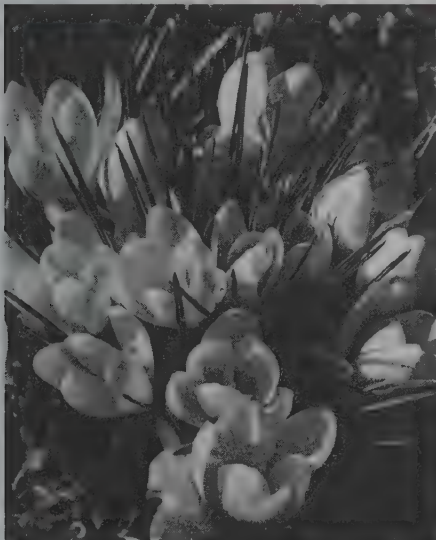
We want to surround ourselves with people who flatter us or meet our needs. He tells us to associate with those who require help from us and can offer nothing in return. He describes that method as the way to true happiness.

Humility is not an easy characteristic to establish in our lives. For example, consider Jesus’ instruction that we should wait to be invited to positions of honor. First of all, some of us don’t have the patience to wait for the Lord’s timing in giving such honor. Others aren’t willing to risk the possibility of never gaining such positions. Still others can’t stay quiet long enough to hear the invitation.

Whatever our excuses, Jesus calls us to throw them aside to join Him in accepting positions of service, whatever and wherever they might be.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, We want to serve You. Help us to be completely committed to Your will without any selfish thoughts or motives. Wash us clean so that You may use us completely as You choose. Amen.

# DEVOTIONS



## April

Eileen H. Wilmoth, Editor  
photo by H. Armstrong Roberts  
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**April 1**

## **JESUS EXAMINED BY PILATE AND HEROD**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 23: 1-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I find no fault in this man (Luke 23:4).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "In the Hour of Trial"

Knowing that Pilate was in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover to prevent any disturbance among the Jews gives us a little better understanding of his vacillation and unwillingness to stand by his pronouncement of Jesus' innocence. He was willing to make any concession to insure peace and keep in favor with the government at Rome.

Pilate, looking for someone else to settle Christ's case, sent Jesus to Herod. Christ could certainly expect no mercy or justice from the cruel man who had ordered John the Baptist to be beheaded. Herod mocked Christ and put kingly robes on Him before sending Him back to Pilate.

Here were two men in positions of power and authority who thought only of their own welfare instead of examining the evidence and making a decision. A conspiracy to do wrong can make strange bedfellows and we are told that Pilate and Herod became friends.

We can learn two very important lessons from this Scripture. First, before making a decision we need to examine the evidence carefully and thoughtfully and, second, we should be very careful of the company we keep.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, help us to make our decisions after prayer and deliberation, putting the welfare of others before our own desires. Help us to be Christlike in our ways. Let us not give in to the pressure and power of ungodliness. In the name of Jesus, amen.

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April 1-7 **Garnet Dixon** is a retired school teacher who enjoys her volunteer work as a recorder for the blind and at Kosair Children's Hospital. She lives in Louisville, Kentucky. She has continued her lifelong study of the Word of God by taking a trip to the Holy Lands.



## INJUSTICE PREVAILS

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 23:13-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Gave My Life for Thee"

Pilate found that Jesus was not guilty of the Sanhedrin's trumped up charges and tried to arrive at a compromise. However, he failed to understand the deep hatred of the Jewish leaders and the mass hysteria of the crowd. Cowardice finally prevailed and he conceded to their wishes. The anger of the chief priests, scribes and elders and the pressure of the crowd carried more weight than the fact that Christ was blameless.

We, too, tend to think that compromise is necessary in the world we live in. Each day we choose the direction our lives will take and we often lack the wisdom and courage to make the difficult choices with which we are faced.

People of authority must often choose between the lesser of two evils rather than between good and evil. No doubt President Truman felt this was the case in his decision to drop the atomic bomb at the end of World War II. Often we ask, "Does the end justify the means?" and the answer is not always easy.

Pilate was in a position where he had to make a choice that he wanted to avoid. How easily we slip into the same predicament when we choose to do a questionable thing, be in an undesirable place or make friends with the wrong people. Just as the tides turned between Palm Sunday and Good Friday, so our hearts change when we lose our zeal for Christ.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, help us to keep our eyes on the goal. Give us courage and strength to remain faithful. Amen.

April 3



## THE WAY OF THE CROSS

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 23: 26-38

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** This is the King of the Jews (Luke 23: 38).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "The Old Rugged Cross"

The mystery of the cross haunts mankind. It is hard for humanity to understand a God who loved us so much that He was willing to send His Son to die for us and a Son who willingly sacrificed His life so that we could live eternally. This gift from Calvary to the heart of mankind enables us to know that everything is settled and our sins are washed away.

Simon of Cyrene, who was possibly only a bystander, helped Jesus bear this cross. Bearing another's pain, suffering for another can bring great blessing. Tradition has it that Simon's sons became Christian leaders. We wonder what stories Simon may have shared with his sons on the night after the crucifixion.

The power of the cross is illustrated dramatically in the life of John Newton, author of the beloved hymn, *Amazing Grace*. He turned from an infidel and slave trader to a man who was preserved, restored and pardoned. He was allowed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.

Just last autumn, I traveled down the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows, and was reminded of the suffering of Christ as He followed that path. Yet, my sorrow turned to joy as I gazed upon the Garden Tomb. So may our lives be filled with joy today.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Loving Father, we offer our thanks for the wonderful gift You gave to us at Calvary. Joy fills our hearts as we think of the suffering it took to cleanse us from sin. May we never forget to share this gift. In the name of Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, we pray. Amen.

## REQUEST GRANTED

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 23: 39-43

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Wonderful Words of Life"

What a contrast we see in the attitude of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. With bitterness and hatred one of the malefactors taunted Jesus and challenged Him to use His power to save Himself. This thief's thoughts were selfish and directed toward saving his own life.

The other thief took an entirely different point of view. First, he admitted that he was getting what he deserved for he was guilty as charged. He recognized the innocence of Christ and the unfairness of His punishment. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10 (*New International Version*), "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." How wonderful to find that when a man is forgotten by all others, he is never forgotten by his heavenly Father.

Three men, three crosses. One man faces death in darkness and without hope. One faces death with light penetrating the darkness, giving hope. On the middle cross is Christ, the hope of the world, dividing heaven and hell.

We can only understand the meaning of the cross when we understand the meaning given us in His Word, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Father, for Your grace that brings us forgiveness today and hope for tomorrow. Open our eyes to the opportunities we have to share with others. In the name of our Savior. Amen.

April 5

## DEATH OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 23: 44-49

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** "Surely this was a righteous man" (Luke 23: 47, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Beneath the Cross of Jesus"

This was an hour, not of defeat but of victory, acclaimed even by a Gentile soldier. It was a time heaven touched earth and the forces of nature were changed. The sun stopped shining and darkness descended at midday. The curtain of the temple was torn in two, indicating that all barriers between God and mankind had been removed through Christ. Now man had direct access to God.

The cross cast its shadow over the earth but the beginning of the church rested on the Resurrection. Jesus had tried to prepare His followers for this event but instead He was betrayed, denied and not understood by any of them. They all fled. Yet Christ himself expressed His sense of completion with, "It is finished."

Christ should not be represented as a dying figure, but as a triumphant king risen from the dead with a crown on His head and a scepter in His hand. It was for this purpose He came into the world and He voluntarily fulfilled that purpose.

This has not changed for us today. Our salvation is still in the hands of God. His forgiveness still is ours if we only believe and accept it. What a wonderful Lord we serve! What a terrible future lies before us if we fail to accept Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty God and Loving Father, we thank You for the love that sent Christ to the cross but we recognize that it is only through the power of the resurrection that we have salvation. Keep us in Thy care. In the name of Jesus, we pray, amen.

## THE BURIAL OF JESUS

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 23: 50-56

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, . . . they laid Jesus there (John 19: 41, 42, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Were You There?"

From man's viewpoint, the end had come as Jesus breathed His last and His body was taken down from the cross; but God wrote "To Be Continued" on the script. Sunset and the beginning of the Passover was approaching; what was to be done with Jesus' body? Bravely, Joseph of Arimethea asked for the body and was given permission to take it. Here was a man who had not assented to the trial and death of Jesus, who was not only rich in worldly goods but also in love and concern. Before this time Joseph had apparently not spoken against Jesus but had not defended him either. However, when the need arose, he took a stand.

The women who had followed Jesus and loved Him, silently watched the preparation and placing of Jesus' body and went home to celebrate the Passover. They would properly embalm and prepare the body after the Sabbath. This was all that was left for them to do to show their love.

Despair and hopelessness filled the hearts of all those who had loved and served Jesus, but a brighter day was coming and hope would replace despair. This can happen in our lives today when we take our eyes off the Savior and look at the ways of the world. We, too, need the "Light of the World" to guide us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, give us the courage to stand up for our convictions. Help us to see the needs of others and find ways to fulfill them. In the name of Jesus, amen.

**April 7**

## **DEATH COULD NOT HOLD HIM**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 24: 1-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He is not here, He is risen: (Luke 24:6).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"

The celebration of Jesus' resurrection is a time for remembrance; a time for thinking back over the past and remembering God's purpose and acting on it. It is a time to recall that our living Lord is not found among the dead or caught up in creeds, rituals or man made ordinances, but is found in the faith that sets its course toward God in hope and love.

The Resurrection is the time to proclaim the glorious beauty of Christ. Life now has new meaning and a new purpose. Man does not acquire immortal stature by throwing this life away. Rather the resurrection challenges mankind to live life with appreciation for what Christ has done and share with others the hope that He gives to each of us. How can we contemplate the wonder of the empty tomb without shouting from the housetops that sin has been conquered and God reigns omnipotent as John states in Revelation 19:6?

The songs associated with the resurrection of Christ lift our thoughts and hearts to heights of worship and mountain top experiences, but we cannot live our entire life as a holiday. We must return to the every day world of problems and sorrows yet know that we can bear any burden that life brings if the promise of eternity with Christ is the center of our lives.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father in Heaven, as we see our world dressed anew in the beauty of springtime, as we put on new clothes to enhance our outward appearance, may we experience a cleansing of our hearts and lives to celebrate the gift of life You have given us. In the name of the resurrected Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 18:10-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** “In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost” (Matthew 18:14, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “The Ninety and Nine”

In a day of form letters and computer lists, it is hard to believe that we really count. The parable of the Good Shepherd teaches us not only that we do matter but also that we matter to God. To Him we are not just the human race, He knows us by name and cares for each of us as individuals. What is it that makes the shepherd in this parable “good?” It is certainly not his business sense. Most of us would look at the ninety-nine that were home and say, “That’s a excellent percentage. That’s nearly 100 percent. Let’s call it a day.” But as startling as it sounds, this parable states that God is not satisfied as long as even one is outside His loving care. That’s good news for us. That’s exceptional news if we happen to be the one who is lost. Leslie Weatherhead used to tell of discovering an orphan girl in the ruins of a bombed out house in London. When he asked who she was, she said, “I’m nobody’s nothing.” The message of this parable is that we never have to say that. We are somebody. We belong to the Creator of all the universe.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, change my heart which is so prone to wandering; bind my wandering heart to thee. Keep me out of the wilderness, but if I wander, help me to hear Your voice and heed Your call. Help me to cherish the safety of the fold. Through Christ, that Great Shepherd of the sheep. Amen.

**April 9**

## **HOME AGAIN**

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Peter 2:18-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:25, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Softly and Tenderly”

Did you hear about the little boy who rebelled every time his mother called him, “My little lamb?” He said, “Mom, I don’t want to be your little lamb, I want to be your little tiger.”

We don’t like being compared to sheep, but that’s what the Bible says we are like. Sheep seem so weak and stupid. The Scripture for today states that like sheep we have wandered, but now we have returned to the Shepherd. Why should we return? Because life with the Shepherd is much better and safer than life in the wilderness. Out in the wilderness we are subject to the cold and danger around us. Out in the wilderness we cannot be sure of our sustenance. Out in the wilderness, we are subject to predators. Back with the Shepherd we can know we will be well cared for and protected from all evils. When we are with Him, we know that we do not need to fear evil. We know that He will care for us. There is His rod and staff to comfort us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, I am so grateful that when I determine to return, that I find Jesus waiting for me. I thank You for the smile on His face. Thanks to Your grace, I am the one who should be smiling. Teach me to stay close to You. Help me to lean on You so that I will not want to wander into the wilderness without You. In the name of Jesus that Great Shepherd of the sheep, amen.



## WHO NEEDS A DOCTOR?

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 5: 27-32

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5: 31, 32, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Just As I Am"

When Jesus called a man named Levi, also known as Matthew, it seemed as if He was making an unlikely choice. Even the angels in Heaven might have cried out and said, "Stop Jesus, you're making a mistake." But, Jesus saw in Levi what others did not see. Levi was so grateful for the change Jesus made in his life that he immediately wanted Jesus to meet all his outcast friends. This did not sit well with the Pharisees since they defined righteousness by ritual and respectability. They could not understand why Jesus would have anything to do with Levi and all his sinful friends. Jesus gave a very practical answer; sick people need a doctor. What if you called 911 and they said, "Call us back when you're feeling better"? Jesus ministered to those who knew they needed help. The Pharisees and teachers of the law needed Jesus, too; they just didn't know it.

We are all sinners though our sins may be of different types. Who needs a doctor? All of us. The only ones who take the cure are those who know their need and want to get well.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, I am so prone to recognizing sin in other's lives, help me to see it in my own life. Having recognized it, let me take it to Jesus that I may be whole. Help me to know when I need the great Physician. Heal me and make me whole again. In the name of Jesus, my Savior, amen.

**April 11**

## **YES, YOU CAN CHANGE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 19:1-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:9, 10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Search Me, O God"

Do you believe God can really change people? Do you believe God can really change you? When you take a look at Zacchaeus, the tax collector, you will see that Jesus changes people. Evidently Zacchaeus wanted to change. His determination to just take a look at Jesus is evidence of his curiosity. Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' house; a daring thing to do considering tax collectors were regarded as outcasts in that society. No doubt Zacchaeus would have assumed that Jesus would never have accepted an invitation, so he did not invite Him to his house. When given the opportunity he gladly welcomes Jesus into his home. Just the presence of Jesus caused a change in Zacchaeus. He agreed to change the way he collected taxes. He agreed to make amends to those he had cheated. When Jesus changes hearts, behavior changes as well. Something even more significant changed for Zacchaeus. Jesus changed his standing with God. Zacchaeus is called, "a child of Abraham." His neighbors would never have given him that status, but God did.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, I keep sinning the same sins over and over. I keep repeating the same mistakes. Help me to believe that with Your help, I can change. I want to change so badly, encourage and enable me. Help me to feel that with Your power, I can make behavioral changes in my life. In Christ, amen.

## FREELY FORGIVEN

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 15:11-24

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and it found.’ So they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:22-24, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Lord I’m Coming Home”

If I had been the prodigal son’s father I don’t think I would have received the prodigal son so graciously. He had been rude to his father. He had despised his family tradition. He wasted an inheritance his father earned by hard work. He behaved like a hedonist. If I did let him back into the family, I would have given him a stern lecture, sent him to his room, and told him I would think about it a few days. I would have accepted him back only in a thoroughly subordinate position. That’s exactly what the prodigal deserved. Actually, he deserved a lot worse.

The father accepts his wayward son immediately and restores him to sonship. Why does the father so freely forgive? The key is not in the son, but in the father. The beautiful thing about the father’s grace is that it is so undeserved. Our God is also a God of wrath, but in the moment of reconciliation, His wrath is tempered by His great love.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O waiting Father, I don’t deserve the ring, the robe or the party. Nevertheless, I will wear the ring and robe and I will attend the party as a tribute to Your amazing grace and to the fact that You still receive prodigals. Thank You for forgiving me of my sinful ways. In the name of Jesus, my personal Savior. Amen.

**April 13**

## **THE OTHER PRODIGAL**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 15:25-32

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams (1 Samuel 15:22, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Amazing Grace How Sweet the Sound!”

I understand the outrage of the prodigal son's older brother. It would make me angry too, to see my profligate brother in fine clothes enjoying the seat of honor at a party. Part of the purpose of this parable is to dramatize for us the outrageousness of grace. I suppose the elder brother should have been more like his father. He should have shared the joy of his brother's return. But instead of being like his father, he couldn't even call the boy “brother,” but referred to him only as his fathers' son.

Look at this situation. There is still a son who is outside the house. Who is away from home now? The elder brother has not run away from home, but he refuses to enter because of his selfishness. It doesn't matter what kind of sin keeps us outside the family of God. Outside the house is outside the house, regardless of how we got there. This is why we can call the elder brother “the other prodigal.” There is room at the table for him too, if he only has the sense to go in.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, now I know that whether I am a hot-blooded sinner or a cold-hearted sinner, I am still in need of Your grace. Thank You for keeping the door open and light on for all wandering sons. In the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## A LESSON FROM THE WORLD

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 16:1-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light (Luke 16:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated"

The parable of the shrewd manager is surely one of the strangest parables in the Scriptures. It appears at first glance to endorse dishonesty, but a second glance will reveal it does not. The man in the story is commended for his shrewdness, not his dishonesty. What did he do? Jesus pointed out that we can take a lesson from the "people of this world." This manager, when he knew he was going to be fired, began to use his influence and energy to curry favor with his boss' business associates, hoping to find a place of employment later. He put all his energy into survival. He knew where his groceries were going to come from.

We need to be prepared for our future. All our energies need to be directed toward that end. There is also a lesson on money here. If the dishonest man of the world will use money to prepare for the future, then we who are spiritual should use our wealth to prepare for the future. Our future is in the kingdom of heaven; that's where we should be investing.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Help me Lord to direct my energies and resources towards the most important things of life. Whether I have a lot or a little, I devote it all to Your kingdom's work. May I be the servant that can be trusted. Through Jesus Christ my Savior, I pray. Amen.

**April 15**

## **SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD**

**SCRIPTURE:** Mark 6:30-34

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things (Mark 6:34, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us”

Of all the earth's creatures, perhaps few are as nearly helpless as are sheep. They have no offensive weapons: they are not speedy in flight. Their teeth are made for biting grass, not for fighting off wolves or bears or any other enemies. Their small, soft hooves are unable to deliver sufficient thrust to protect them. Hence they need the constant oversight of a shepherd, who must, in addition to this care, lead them from one area to another in order to find good pastures for grazing and water. And he must give special protective care at night.

When we think of Jesus as our Great Shepherd, we may not think first of the very aspect of His work as that which is mentioned in the text for the day: “. . . He began teaching them many things.” This should not be a strange role for Jesus to fill in our own lives. And for our very soul's protection, we Christians need to learn who our enemies are, and how to confound and defeat them; we need to be led in our feasting on the Bread of Life and the Living Water—two essentials which only our Good Shepherd can provide.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Surely, Lord, “All we, like sheep, have gone astray,” and daily need You to teach us—teach us to find and feed upon the Bread of Life, and drink of the Living Water of Your Word. Then lead us gently, safely into Your eternal fold, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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April 15-21 **Brant Lee Doty** is Professor Emeritus at Great Lakes Christian College in Lansing, Michigan, where he makes his home with his wife, Ruth.

## ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 10:19-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Make Me a Blessing”

“That was a fine sermon,” she said, smiling warmly, after I had struggled through my first effort in the pulpit. I knew better. Despite lengthy preparation and a father whose preaching was always both inspiring and interesting, mine had been mostly smatterings of thought, strung to a simple outline and poorly illustrated. What is more, it had taken me upwards of fifty minutes to grind it out! I thank God for a wonderful Christian lady who had even managed to stay awake to its end. The words of this senior saint, for whom I had the highest respect, meant everything to me at the moment. Doubtless the Lord has forgiven her for her well-intended “white lie!”

Many a young Christian has been brought from some similar situation by such kindly, understanding words. All of us as Christians may have such opportunities, and, praise God, we do not always fail to follow a similar course of action.

Every Christian can find and help others in one way or another. We have opportunities to encourage the disheartened, cheer the faint, console the suffering, befriend the friendless, and otherwise do what Jesus would have us do. Look about you now, and pray to let Him “make me a blessing today.”

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, please make me sensitive to others’ needs and responsive to help. Especially may I be quick to share my faith in Jesus Christ, my blessings to those who have need, and may all be done to glorify Your Son, who always went about doing good. We pray through Jesus Christ. Amen.

April 17

## GOD'S RESURRECTING POWER

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 13:17-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him (1 Thessalonians 4:14, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Low in the Grave He Lay"

We who live in areas where winter seems annually to kill everything green, have a special thrill when, with warming weather, the new grass sprouts, trees burst forth with leaves and blossoms, and all nature comes beautifully alive again. I would not want to live where this marvelous reaffirmation of God's power and beauty could not be witnessed each spring. It is one of His primary answers to the infidel and the skeptic!

Jesus possessed such power inherently: "No one takes it (my life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18, *New King James Version*). Founders of other religions often take great pride in showing the ornate tombs of their religions' founders, whereas Christians can point with a great victorious faith to the empty tomb near Golgotha's hill. He Who created can resurrect us, and we have the ultimate answer to the question Job posed, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" The resounding "'Yes—in Jesus Christ!" is for all the world to hear.

Fools will say this is but "Pie in the sky, by and by." We know better. We trust the great power of our Creator, and the personal promise and divine demonstration of our Lord and Saviour: in Him we shall truly be made alive again.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, how wonderful to know that You are the Lord of the living! Our faith rests in Jesus Christ. Amen.



## CORRUPT LEADERSHIP

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 22:23-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** There is a conspiracy of her princes within her like a roaring lion tearing its prey; they devour people, take treasures and precious things and make many widows within her (Ezekiel 22:25, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Would Be True"

Perhaps the single all-pervading characteristic required in one who would hold a ruling position is the possession of pure integrity, of which the essential ingredients are truthfulness, virtue, and justice. Only in possessing these in some portion may leaders fairly hold any position of responsibility; without them, effective leadership becomes impossible.

A familiar example of this latter problem is clearly personified by the Herodian lineage, kings of Judea. Jesus encountered two of these during His earthly sojourn, and each of the incidents touching them was very sour: in the first Herod sought to kill Jesus and failed (Matthew 2), but he murdered hundreds of infant boys in the attempt. Later, his son put "John the Immerser" to death for speaking out against his illegitimate marriage (Matthew 14:1-12), and he was guilty of sentencing Jesus to the cross, on which occasion Jesus would not so much as speak one word to the wicked king (Luke 23:6:15). Two final experiences, both involving his grandson, included the murder of James (Acts 12:2), and imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:3-19). The second Herod had murdered his favorite wife (he had five) and favored son, fearing their ambition.

It was said, "I'd rather be Herod's hog than his son!"

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Lord, guide our leaders, nationally and locally, to be guided by Your truth. May we be good citizens. Through Christ, amen.

April 19

## GOD KNOWS HIS OWN

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Timothy 2:14-19

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** “The Lord knows those who are his,” and “Every-one who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wicked-ness” (2 Timothy 2:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Be Not Dismayed Whate’er Betide”

A naturalist’s book which describes the habits and characteristics of birds told of the following incident, which he witnessed. A mother bird, feeding three small ones in her nest, brought various insects and worms to her young, which were aligned in order. After she had fed the first, the third one moved into the second slot in order to receive the next worm. But the mother bird, discerning the change, bypassed that little one, feeding the rightful baby. Again, during the mother’s absence, the little claim-jumper returned to the third slot to be fed next, and was overlooked. He was skipped again and again until he learned to stay where he belonged.

You can’t fool God. Don’t try! He sees beyond the gaudy clothing into the vacuous heart; behind the deed to the motive; behind the word to the intent.

On the other hand, the child of God, assured of His providential care, and aware of His omniscience, must conduct himself as a proper offspring. Paul’s warning zeroes in on quarreling, godless chatter, carelessness in handling “the word of truth,” and wandering from that truth. The goal always before us is to become workmen who do not need to be ashamed . . . correctly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear heavenly Father, how often we act like foolish children. We need to take a deep, honest look inside ourselves to detect evil thoughts, selfish whims, and overt rebellion. Live within us, O Lord, and subject our wills to You in all things. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## GENUINE SECURITY

**SCRIPTURE:** John 10:22-30

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand," (John 10:29, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less"

Despite the best concepts and efforts of this world's outstanding architects, engineers, and builders, nobody has come up with fool-proof structures which can withstand the wild ravages of earthquake, hurricane, flood, and tornado. Every year, it seems, our own land suffers from natural disasters at great cost in lives and property damage.

Far worse, however, are the ravages of Satan upon the unwary or careless souls. While it is true that "no one can snatch them (Christians) out of the Father's hand," as our text affirms, it is equally true that any one of His children may, of his own will, become obstinate, rebellious, or apostate. Satan throws spiritual floods, earthquakes, and tornadoes at us, and not a few are spiritually destroyed. However, it need not be so: doubt is overwhelmed by faith and absolute trust in Him; temptation is defeated by resolute resistance to sin's allurements; error is refuted by reliance upon His Word of Truth, and so it goes.

The figure of the well-equipped Christian soldier in Ephesians 6:10-18 is reassuring, offering both adequate defense against the Devil's wily weapons and weapons for attack and victory for those who will utilize what God supplies.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, we do not pray that we may never be tempted or tested by the devil's wiles, but that we may use the power You have given us in Your Spirit to resist all trials we encounter. May we see that victory is through Your power. In the name of Jesus, amen.

April 21

## AUTHENTICATED BY WORKS

**SCRIPTURE:** John 10:31-42

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** By their fruit you shall recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:16, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Give of Your Best to the Master"

Years ago we planted two walnut trees in our yard. One is now nearly thirty-feet tall, and annually bears a fine crop of nuts. The second one is scarcely half that tall, and has yet to produce its first nut. You see, termites attacked it and we could find no adequate way to prevent damage. Its growth has been severely impeded, its productivity nullified. Of questionable value, it is scheduled for removal. Fruitless fruit trees are expendable: cut down and destroyed (Matthew 7:19).

Christians are expected to be spiritual fruit-bearers. The primary fruit is found in winning souls to Jesus Christ. Just as in the physical realm, maturity is required before reproduction occurs. We are under constraint of the gospel to bring the lost to Jesus Christ. We must be on guard against invidious enemies of our Lord: the various destructive termites, who undermine our spiritual purity; our foundations of faith; the dilatory, who are lazy and non-productive in spiritual growth; the apostate, who fall away from their convictions, and all who oppose or neglect their moral or spiritual growth.

We do not work in order to earn our salvation by our own merit, but to demonstrate true commitment to Jesus Christ and to bring others to share in His essential, available grace.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, we would be fruit-bearers in Your kingdom. Help us to demonstrate our faith in Jesus. Lead us to be acceptable servants in Your kingdom. This we pray in Christ Jesus, amen.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SON

**SCRIPTURE:** John 13:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover (Mark 14:16, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord"

On April 21, 1993, my brother died unexpectedly at the age of 41. He left behind 14 month-old twins, a frightened wife, heart-broken parents, and a brother who had never considered being the only living son. I was not prepared.

It has haunted me that I cannot remember the last thing my brother and I talked about. I cannot remember the last time we were together, although we were close. I have often wondered what that last conversation would have been like if either of us had had any warning of what was about to happen.

Would I have told him how important he was to me? Would he have asked me to help get his material things in order? Would we have talked about spiritual matters? Would I have urged him to come back to the teachings of our youth and once again embrace Jesus Christ as his Savior? ~

The apostles prepared for Christ's death without knowing it; they simply carried out His instructions.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, it is easy for me to follow Your leading when I know the dangers and the glories ahead. Help me to walk with You and prepare for the uncertainties of tomorrow in the knowledge of what You have told us. In the name of my personal Savior, Jesus Christ.

April 23

## REAL MEN DON'T NEED INSTRUCTIONS

**SCRIPTURE:** John 13:12-30

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Surrender All”

The material man is self-contained, self-aware, and self-fulfilling. He doesn't use the manufacturer's instructions to assemble that gift; he doesn't ask for anyone's help or comfort; and he doesn't ever stop to ask for directions—no matter how lost he is. While comedians make jokes about these conditions, they actually are at the heart of our rebellion against God.

What?!! Just because I don't look at the manual unless I have “parts left over,” does that means I hate God?

Of course not. But it is that same need for independence that drives us away from God. The Americanized proverb says, “God helps those who help themselves.” But Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5, *New International Version*).

God's charge to Adam and Eve wasn't to *do*, it was to *be*. It wasn't until they were no longer content to be with God, until they started trying to rely on their own abilities, that the Garden was no longer big enough for all of them.

We tend to get caught up in the DO instructions of Christ, and forget that the one He said was the most important is a BE instruction: love God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, I know You have deeds that need doing and tasks that need taken care of, and I am willing to go where You send and do what You ask. But today, Lord, help me to *be* closer to You and to love You more completely. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

## SATAN'S FAVORITE PLAYGROUND

**SCRIPTURE:** John 13:31-38

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (Galatians 5:15, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "They Will Know We Are Christians"

Several years ago I was hired as a producer in a television production facility in East Tennessee. The TV industry, the most influential of mediums, is not known normally for its spiritual environment, so you can imagine my delight as I got to know the dozen or so employees and learned that each of them had a very individually deep faith in God.

These weren't just casual Christians. There was an elder, a Sunday school superintendent, three deacons, and one spent weekends preaching and singing in a gospel quartet. I was thrilled that God led me to work with them.

Six months later my pleasure turned to pain amid the most hurtful acts of distrust and backbiting that I had ever experienced. Disillusioned and sharing the guilt, I turned to the engineer, a man of demonstrated wisdom and encouragement, for an explanation. Acknowledging my observations, he simply asked, "Where else would the devil rather play?" He suggested that Satan already has possession of offices where only two or three Christians labor in relative obscurity, ". . . but think of what a group of faithful followers could accomplish if left alone to exercise their beliefs."

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, sometimes it seems like it is easier to get along with my non-Christian friends than with my brothers. Help me to follow Your spirit, so that my fellowship with You is complete. Amen.

April 25

## ALL OR NOTHING AT ALL

**SCRIPTURE:** John 14:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** This is what the Lord says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, . . . Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past (Isaiah 43:16, 18, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “He Leadeth Me! O Blessed Thought”

Imagine a beautiful island several miles off the coast. Because of the rough waters which separate the island from the mainland, the only access is over a very long bridge. However, many people trying to get to the island don't believe the bridge actually goes where they want to go, or they view the bridge as a trick or a trap or just not exciting, so they try their boats or they try to swim the distance. In each case they eventually drown in their efforts to reach the object of their desire.

Some of those not willing to use the bridge do try to stay very close to it because they feel safer. Others, trying to prove their own abilities, intentionally stay far away. Some perish under the water shortly after beginning their trek, while others are nearly within reach of their goal before slipping into their watery graves. But each one remains separated from the island. Each one who tries on their own fails. Each one is completely dead; there is no measurement or degree of success other than crossing the water completely.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father God, as we seek our way to You, remind us that You have provided us passage through Christ, and that there is no other way. Lead us, O Father, to be willing to give our all to Your kingdom. Help us to follow Your ways. Let us look to the future of everlasting joy in You. In the name of Jesus. Amen.



## LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

**SCRIPTURE:** John 14:8-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, (John 5:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “More Like Jesus”

My son should be a junior in college as you read this. I say *should* because, frankly, I’m not sure what he’ll be doing, if anything. He’s a great kid and I love him very much, but if he would just be more like me, his life—and mine—would be a lot easier. I mean, I have the experience and the wisdom to handle the situations today which give him such painful problems. If he would just use his head a little, he could figure most of it out on his own, because everyone knows I did when I was his age. . . .

It’s at this point in my frustration that my wife generally points out that he is handling things about the same way I did when I was his age. I hate it when she does that.

I often wonder if God ever had any of these feelings of frustration when Christ was growing up. I doubt it because the father-son relationship in my life is distorted by sin—mine and my son’s. But, even through that distortion the similarities are still evident between us, whether either of us likes it or not.

The Father-Son relationship of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, is one of perfection. Jesus tells us in the Word that He can do nothing without the Father.

Let us strive to be like Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, I am Your child and I thank You. It is my desire to have You to let others see You through me, but I seem to get in the way a lot. Forgive me. Strengthen me. Draw me to You for Your glory. Help me to follow after Your Son and my Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name I pray. Amen.

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April 27

## THE COUNSELOR IS IN

**SCRIPTURE:** John 14:15-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Woe to him who says to wood, "Come to life!" Or to lifeless stone, "Wake up!" Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it (Habakkuk 2:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I am Weak, but Thou Art Strong"

Where do you seek guidance? Friends. Co-workers. Relatives. Whose values do you apply in your life?

Credit. Cash. Barter. What worth do you place on advice?

King Saul, the man picked by God to stand head and shoulders over Israel as her king, had a problem knowing who to listen to. In fact, this weakness apparently was directly related to God ending Saul's life and turning his kingdom over to someone else (I Chronicles 10:13-14). God takes very seriously this issue of where we seek our counsel.

This should not be hard for us to understand. When someone asks your opinion, then takes someone else's advice, don't you feel a little disappointed? Or when your son or daughter asks their friend's parents something that, without a doubt, you are more qualified to handle, doesn't that strike at the heart of the relationship, especially when the advice is poor?

How much more must God be offended when He has offered His counsel through Scripture and through the Holy Spirit, and we, instead, seek the ways of the world?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, Your wisdom is great and Your timing is perfect. I know that and yet, in my weakness, I turn to earthly leaders and values for direction. Forgive me. I want to walk with You more closely today than I did yesterday. Counsel me in Your ways. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

## TO KNOW, KNOW, KNOW HIM IS TO LOVE, LOVE, LOVE HIM

**SCRIPTURE:** John 14:21-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly. I obey your precepts and your statutes, for all my ways are known to you (Psalm 119:167, 168, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Awesome God”

Do you speed?

Do you fudge a little on your income taxes?

Do you use God’s name in vulgar or angry ways?

Our desire—and maybe even our ability—to obey earthly laws and rules is deeply rooted in our view of those who make the rules. Remember the playground bully? Most kids played his games and followed his rules because they were afraid of getting pounded. But when you first started dating that really special someone, can you recall the initial rules of that relationship that developed between you? We obeyed those “rules” because we were in love and didn’t want to do anything which would displease this most wonderful person in the world.

As we seek to follow God’s leading, how do we view Him? Is He the bully in our lives ready to punish us, or is He simply more important to us than all others? Or is it somewhere in between?

Which view do you think God would want us to have?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, my love for You is strong, but it is imperfect because of my sin. I sometimes get confused because I forget how great is your power to forgive and I fear Your punishment. Help me to stay focused on Your greatness so that I can abide in You. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

April 29

## BROKEN THINGS

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 51:10-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:17, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Lord Jesus, I Long to Be Perfectly Whole"

We live in a "throw-away" world. Things are made to be used until they break, and then they are thrown away. In fact, there are a lot of products which are not useful until they are broken or discarded. Think about the seal on a bottle of medicine. Think, too, about egg shells.

The Bible has illustrations of things which were not useful until they were broken. The alabaster box of ointment which Mary used to anoint Jesus in the home of Simon (Mark 14:1-9). It was of no use until it was broken. The roof which was torn up when the four men brought their friend to Jesus was expendable (Mark 2:1-5). All our resources should be considered expendable when bringing people to Him. Jesus thought of His own life as being expendable. It was His body which was broken for us (I Corinthians 11:23-26). If it had not been broken we could have no salvation.

God desires a broken heart in us. No amount of sacrifice will substitute for personal commitment. I once knew a man who tithed his income regularly, but his life was never given to the Lord. The sacrifice that is acceptable to God must begin, not with our offering, but with our lives.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Your Word tells us Lord, that You resist the proud and give grace to the humble. Give us, Lord, that humility of spirit which teaches us to give ourselves first to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

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April 29—May 5. **Ross Dampier** recently celebrated fifty years in Christian ministry. He and his wife, Lorraine, serve the Central Christian Church in Bristol, Tennessee.

## BEAUTY FOR ASHES

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 61:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Rejoice in the Lord always; *and* again I say, Rejoice (Philippians 4:4).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Rejoice, the Lord Is King"

Many passages of Scripture imply stories which are not told. In Isaiah 61:3 we have the picture of a woman whose husband goes on a journey. She kisses him good-bye and waits anxiously for his return, but he does not come back. Then one day she hears that he is dead and she goes into mourning. She puts on widow's clothing and smears ashes over her face. Her sorrow is deep and genuine, for her loss is real. Then one day the impossible happens. Her husband returns, for he is not dead after all. What a difference there is in her approach to life. She washes her face, anoints herself with oil, puts on a new dress, and flowers in her hair. She exchanges ashes for beauty!

For those who are genuinely concerned for salvation in their personal lives, and for the condition of a lost world, Jesus comes to provide beauty for ashes. It was no accident that at the beginning of His ministry Jesus read this passage in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21).

When Jesus comes into our lives He provides the beauty of service for the ashes of selfishness. He provides the oil of forgiveness in place of our mourning for guilt. He promises the garment of resurrection for the shroud of death. What a joy that our eternal hope is in Him!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear heavenly Father, we come today rejoicing in the coming of the Lord Jesus by which we are given so much. We rejoice also in the promise of His coming again. We are told that the nations of the earth will mourn, but as Christians we will be glad in Him. Amen.

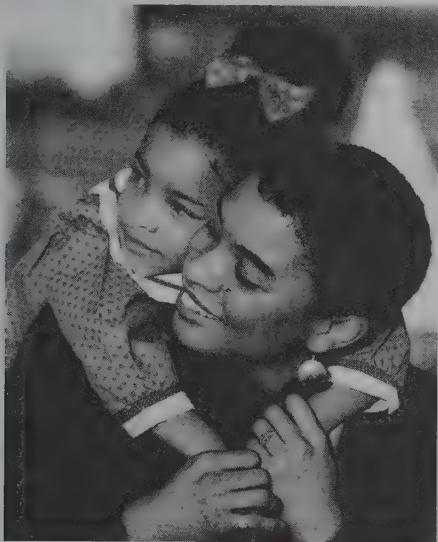
## My Prayer Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

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# DEVOTIONS

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## May

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photo by H. Armstrong Roberts

May 1

## THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 37:8-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Take My Life and Let It Be"

Sir J. M. Barrie once wrote a play called *The Admirable Crichton*. It was a commentary on the British social system. It concerned a family who lived on inherited wealth. All their needs were met with money and the help of a perfect servant, Crichton. He could do anything and the whole family depended on him.

In the second act they are all shipwrecked. There are plenty of natural resources, but everything has to be prepared in some way. There is so much work to be done that everyone has to help in order to survive, but since no one has any idea of what to do, Crichton ends up giving the orders. In other words, they are all working for him.

In the third act they have all been rescued and are back in England, living on their inherited wealth and depending on Crichton to do everything for them.

The Scripture speaks to us of a time when the meek shall inherit the earth. The proud man gives orders that are obeyed, but there will come a time when society will be turned upside down. The proud man will give orders and no one will obey. The humble man who is born to serve finds more opportunity for service than ever before. Jesus said that the greatest would be the one who serves.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, we are Your servants. Show us how we can give the cup of cold water in the name of Jesus. Make our lives a blessing through the opportunities that come our way, in Jesus' name, amen.



## GOD'S CARE FOR ME

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 26:7-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee:* (Isaiah 26:3).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Be Not Dismayed Whate'er Betide"

The Georgia State Missionary Rally is held each year in early March at the East Point Christian Church. The program features several missionaries who represent different areas of missionary activity. One of my favorite parts on the program in past years has been a time of personal witness in which those participating talked for a few minutes on the topic, "God's Care for Me." Ways in which God has watched over them are as varied as the personalities of the people involved, and as different as the areas in which they serve.

Many of the people involved have expressed appreciation for this program feature. It gives the missionary an opportunity to stop and count their blessings. It challenges them to face the question, "In what ways has God looked after me?" As an exercise in our daily devotions each one of us should consider that question. In our quiet time we need to think of specific situations which call attention to the ways in which God is watching over us. This providential care is not always dramatic, but it is always there. We must keep in mind that in every situation of life God is watching over us. Our faith does not depend on empty promises. It rests in experience. Even in dark times God is there looking after us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Lord, for always being there for us. May we never take for granted all the things You do for us. We praise You for Your faithfulness to us through Jesus Christ, our Savior, in whose name we pray, amen.

**May 3**

## **WHAT IS GOD DOING NOW?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 103:6-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Bless the LORD O my soul, and forget not all his benefits (Psalm 103:2).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “When Peace Like a River Attendeth”

I once was asked by a veteran’s organization to conduct a Sunday evening service for their group in the church where I ministered. I preached on the parable of the wicked husbandmen who rejected the son of the owner of the vineyard. The climax of the story is in Luke 20:15, “What therefore shall the Lord of the vineyard do unto them?” I called the sermon, “What Is God Doing Now?” My first point was, He is looking after you, just as He did when you made all those foxhole promises.

How does God spend His time? The Scripture tell us that He upholds all things by the Word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). He must be very busy running the universe. But most of all He is busy looking after people like us. He gives us every good and perfect gift (James 1:17).

How do we respond? Many people respond with complete indifference. They take all His blessings for granted. We are often on such an ego trip that we act as though everything we own is a result of how smart we are. Let us strive to consider that God is the one who provides. With all the other things He has to do His number one concern is looking after the ones He loves.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, today as we look about us, help us to see Your hand in all things. We must depend on You for all we have; for our very lives. Make us thankful not only for things, but for people, and most of all for our salvation in Christ, in whose name we pray, amen.

## THE PEACE CHILD

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 12:12-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed *each other* (Psalm 85:10).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O what a Wonderful, Wonderful Day"

George E. Pickett, who led the famous charge at the battle of Gettysburg, was one of the most popular officers in the Confederate Army. Before the famous battle, the armies of the Union and the Confederacy were drawn up in opposition to one another along a front that stretched for several miles. That night, word was received that General Pickett's wife had given birth to a son. All along the Confederate line, cheers of congratulation went up and huge bonfires were built in celebration of his newborn son.

General Ulysses Grant heard the celebration and asked about the commotion. When he was told the cause he said, "Haven't we any kindling on this side of the line? Strike up a row of lights for young Pickett and his new son." Soon, bonfires were blazing on both sides of the line. Firing ceased and peace was celebrated because a child had been born.

So our peace comes to us because a child is born. It is through Him that we become right with God. It is by His righteousness that we are saved. There is an essential relationship between peace and holiness. Only when Jesus Christ comes into our lives can we be at peace with God, and with our fellowmen.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear heavenly Father, in a world in which there is so much violence, we thank You for bringing peace. Even when there is stress and conflict all around us may we find in You the peace that passes all understanding. In Jesus' name, amen.

May 5

## DELIVER US FROM EVIL

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 7:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: (Matthew 6:13).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Teach Me To Pray, Lord"

We see David as a very human character. His great enemy is Saul, and in the Psalms he prays many times to be delivered from him. Our arch-enemy is Satan, and our Lord teaches us that we will be delivered from him. He tempts us in the little problems that confront us daily. The little prayers we pray deliver us from evil.

The little prayers that common people pray  
From deep within their spirits, day by day,  
About their problems, and each mundane task,  
The ordinary little things for which they ask.  
"Lord, help my sister, she's so weak and ill,  
And teach her weary spirit to be still."  
"O, Father, be with Bill, and make him see  
The need to cast his every care on Thee."  
"In all I do may Thy great will be done,  
And Lord, make Thy great will and mine be one."  
"Lord, day by day give me the faith serene,  
To seek deliverance from this worldly scene."  
Such short and simple prayer come to Thy throne,  
From hearts that feel forsaken and alone.  
For all the little prayers that people pray  
I doubt that any ever went astray.—Ross H. Dampier

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Like the disciples of old we come to Thee, Lord, saying, "Teach us to pray." May our prayers ascend to Your throne like a sweet savor. In Jesus' name, amen.

## LOVE TRANSLATED INTO LIFE

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 John 3:11-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "We Are One In the Spirit"

Love is one of the most powerful words in the English language, but it is used so frequently with such a variety of meanings that it is losing its impact. We use it for trivial things: "I love pistachio ice cream." We use it to describe relationships, whether they are appropriate or not. We use it to describe our patriotism: "I love my country." We use it to describe our highest religious commitments: "I love God."

In today's Scripture, John deals with our love for one another. To make certain that the word is not trivialized, he gives several examples to show exactly what he has in mind. First of all, he tells us what love is not: Cain killing his brother Abel; hatred toward another even if it does not result in violent acts toward that person.

Then he gives us some specific actions that demonstrate what love really is: the willingness to lay down one's life for another; ministering to the physical needs of a brother. These specific examples keep us from using the word love glibly or casually. He insists that we must do more than talk about love. We must put some walk in our talk.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear loving Father, You showed us what love really was when You sent Your Son into the world to die for us. Teach us how to translate that example into our daily lives. In the name of Him who "so loved the world" we pray. Amen.

May 7

## OBEDIENCE BRINGS ASSURANCE

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 John 3:19-24

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments (1 John 2:3).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Blessed Assurance"

The building of the Golden Gate Bridge proved to be a very hazardous venture, and during the early months of work, several workers fell to their death. Then, at considerable expense, a safety net was built which saved the lives of at least ten men who fell into it. As a result of this safety feature, the men lost their fear of the job and worked with greater confidence, causing production to proceed at a much faster rate.

Some Christians are like those early workers. They are fearful and unsure of their salvation, and as a result are not nearly as productive in their Christian life as they ought to be. In today's verse John addresses this problem. If we occasionally have doubts about our salvation, John instructs us to look to Jesus. When we keep God's commandments, we can be assured that we truly know Him. To keep His commandments we must know them, and to know them we must study His Word to learn them. A diligent study of the Bible and a Christian life style based on that study will provide us a safety net that can deliver us from the doubts that may occasionally plague us. Our emotions frequently betray us, but knowledge of Scriptures can bring assurance.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Forgive us, dear Father, for the doubts that sometimes keep us from serving You as faithfully as we should. Help us to understand Your Word that we may avoid these doubts and fears. Teach us the truths that free us from doubts. Thank You for giving to us the assurance of salvation through Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

## MAKE ME THE THREAD

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 5:13-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow"

Obedience is not a popular word among many people today. To obey means that we must surrender our will to another and follow rather than lead. More often we would much rather "do our own thing." We even carry this attitude into our relationship with God. All too often we refuse to carry out the plain commandments He has given us, or we interpret them in such a way as to avoid their obvious meaning.

One day a minister overheard one of the church members praying over and over again, "O Lord, make me the thread, make me the thread, make me the thread."

Later he mentioned to the person that he had overheard his prayer and asked him, "That seems a strange thing to pray. What in the world did you mean by it?"

"I guess it would sound strange if that is all you heard," came the man's reply. "But first I prayed that God would be the needle. Then I prayed that He would make me the thread. Wherever the needle goes, the thread follows. I was praying that He will make me like the thread so that I will follow Him wherever He leads."

What a graphic way to put it! May we all learn to submit ourselves to Him, willing to be the thread that follows Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Teach us, Father, Your will. Help us to accept Your will humbly. Then show us how to teach others to follow You. Help us to accept the fact that this is the way to true greatness. Amen.

**May 9**

## **A DANGEROUS SWORD**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 5:21-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: (Matthew 5:22).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Make Me a Channel of Blessing"

A wise old man once had an unusual sword hanging on his wall. It was a large sword with a very sharp blade. On the handle was inscribed the word "Anger." If one looked closely at the handle, he would see something quite strange. Embedded in the handle were several razor-sharp blades that would inflict serious cuts on the hand of anyone who grasped it. The man had an explanation for such an unusual sword. "This sword is probably more dangerous to the user than the intended victim. That's why I call it 'Anger.' You see, anger in our hearts is like this sword. Anger is very often much more dangerous to the person who harbors it than to the object of his hatred."

Physicians readily agree that anger produces bad physical consequences—increased blood pressure, ulcers, sleeplessness, headaches, and many other symptoms. In a similar way the Great Physician informs us that anger also produces bad spiritual consequences. Anger that we allow to fester in our hearts can lead to hateful words and even violent actions against others. Even worse, it can cause us to stand condemned in the final judgment.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, teach us to look to Jesus as an example for our lives. He showed us how to love rather than hate, how to forgive rather than hold grudges, how to serve rather than hurt. In the name of our Savior, Jesus, we pray, amen.



## KEEP THE CONTAINER CLEAN

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 5:27-32

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:28).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Cleanse Me"

A biology student was having trouble growing a culture in a petri dish. Each time he tried, something got into the medium and contaminated his experiment. Finally he turned to the laboratory assistant for help. "The growing medium is sterile and the culture is proper, but every time something goes wrong," he explained.

"Did you carefully sterilize the petri dish?" asked the laboratory assistant.

"Well, I thought I did," came his reply; "but I'll give it another try and be especially careful." The extra care paid off, and he was able to complete his experiment.

This resembles the way that Jesus looks upon sin. He requires His followers to be morally pure. To achieve this goal, He has given us important teachings about purity. These teachings must be planted in our hearts and allowed to grow there. That's why it is so important that we guard the purity of our hearts. No matter how pure the teachings are, if they are placed in a contaminated container, they will become contaminated. Sinful actions are tragic, but sinful actions begin in a contaminated heart that harbors evil thoughts.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Create within us, O Father, a clean heart. Purge out every impurity that can grow into a monstrous sin. May Your Word find lodging in our cleansed hearts so that we do not sin against You. We pray this prayer in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

**May 11**

## **JUST TELL THE TRUTH**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 5:33-37

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (Matthew 5:37).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Would Be True"

A young boy was once summoned to be a witness in a court case. The opposing lawyer began to cross-examine him vigorously, hoping to destroy his credibility, but the lad remained unruffled, answering every question quickly and clearly. Finally the lawyer asked, "Did your father tell you how to testify?"

"Yes, sir, he did."

"Aha," responded the lawyer, thinking he now had destroyed the boy's testimony. "Just exactly what did your father tell you to say?"

"Sir," came the boy's response, "he told me always to tell the truth. He said that you would try to mix me up, but that if I always told the truth I wouldn't have anything to worry about."

The father gave his son good advice, the same advice that Jesus gave in today's Scripture verse. That advice is still quite appropriate for our age in which we have invented all kinds of clever ways to avoid telling the truth. From advertisers, politicians, government officials, journalists, and lawyers we hear a steady stream of half-truths, misrepresentations, and bald lies. How refreshing it would be if we could just make our yeas really mean yea and our nays mean nay.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father God, author of all truth, we pray that You will guide us into truthfulness. Give us the wisdom and the courage always to speak the truth in love no matter what it may cost us. Help us to follow the example of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. We pray this prayer today in His name. Amen.

## EXTENDING OUR BOUNDARIES

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:25-37

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all they strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself (Luke 10:27).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Make Me a Blessing"

A farmer, when confronted with this passage, insisted that he loved his neighbor, that is, he loved everyone whose land touched his. Of course, that ruled out almost everyone, especially those who lived on the other side of the globe. On one occasion his minister began to question him: "How deep does your land extend?"

"Well, I never thought about it much," replied the farmer, but I guess it extends clean down to the center of the earth."

"And the man on the other side of the earth, how far down does his land extend?" was the minister's next question.

"I guess it extends down to the center of the earth too," was his response.

"In that case, then," replied the minister, "if your land extends to the center of the earth and the land of the man on the other side of the world also extends to the center of the earth, then your property lines touch in the middle. By your definition, that makes you and him neighbors and you ought to love him."

This wonderful parable tells us that love knows no property lines, that our love should reach out to everyone.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Energize our love, Father, so that it will break out of the narrow boundaries we have drawn about it. Lead us to realize that anyone who needs our help is our neighbor. In the name of Jesus, we pray, amen.

May 13

## NEVER DESERT GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 1:6-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ (Galatians 1:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "How Firm a Foundation!"

We read in the book of Acts, chapter 2, that the first Christians enjoyed "the favor of all the people." It was said of the youthful Jesus that He grew in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). It is no sin to have the approval of men. And the disapproval of men is no sign that we have the approval of God! In today's Scripture reading the apostle Paul is talking about those who forsook the original gospel for another. It was not a totally new gospel, but it was a distortion of what they had been taught. Paul said that they did it in order to win the approval of others.

Whatever the motive, we must not forsake what Christ and the apostles have taught us through the Word of God. Sometimes people forsake the true gospel because they want to sin. Sometimes they do it for monetary gain. Sometimes they do it to boost their own egos. In fact, some forsake the true gospel for a new teaching simply because they are bored.

What must be remembered is this. When people forsake the gospel they forsake God. Notice verse 6 in today's Scripture. The one forsaken is not Paul. It is God who called them by the grace of Christ Jesus. Let us never forsake Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Lord, I know that You will never desert me. I pray today that I will never desert You. And if I do, please receive me back again. In Jesus' name, amen.

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May 13-19, **Robert Shannon** serves as Professor of Preaching and Church Leadership at Atlanta Christian College in East Point, Georgia. He and his wife, Jean, have two grown children. For many years he has been involved in taking the gospel to Eastern Europe.

## WHAT MAKES GOD HAPPY?

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 147:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord delights in those who fear him (Psalm 147:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee"

When you were a child did you ever try to count the stars? God implied to Abraham that the number was beyond counting (Genesis 15:5; Hebrews 11:12). Astronomers estimate that there are 30 billion stars. Psalm 147 says that God knows how many there are and has names for them all! Surely He is an infinite God. We find delight in the stars, and the clouds and the rain. We find joy in the pastoral scene described in this chapter: cattle grazing on the green grass, ravens flying across the sky. What brings delight to God? It is not these material things that so delight us. God finds joy in us. He finds joy in us when we fear Him. Perhaps reverence would be a better word to describe it. He finds joy in us when we place our hope in His love!

The various translations can help us appreciate the magnitude of the love of God toward us. The Revised Version Bible translates it "his steadfast love." The Modern Language Bible (Verkuyl) translates it "covenant love." The King James version of the Bible has *mercy* in the place of love. The New International Version of the Bible has *unfailing love*. How difficult it is to adequately describe God's attitude toward us! He is steadfast. He is merciful. He is unfailing. When we trust Him, we make Him happy. It is an awesome thought!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Lord, I shudder to think that I have so often made You sad. Forgive me for that. And, strange as it seems to say, may I today do something, or say something or be someone, that will make You satisfied with me. In Jesus' name, amen.

May 15

## SAVED BY HOPE

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 39:1-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you (Psalm 39:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less”

Some people say that we are saved by works. However, we are convinced that we are saved by faith. All know that we are saved by grace. It is also true that we are saved by hope. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doeth he yet hope for? (Romans 8:24). We learn much about hope from the New Testament. The apostle Paul called it a blessed hope (Titus 2:17). The apostle Peter called it a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). The apostle John called it a purifying hope (1 John 3:3). But the word *hope* appears more often in the book of Psalms than in any other Biblical book.

A university student once asked Billy Graham what had surprised him most in his long career. He said, “the shortness of life.” That surprises us all. “When as a child I laughed and wept, time crept.” But as I grew older, time seemed to move faster and faster. The writer of Psalm 39 is meditating on the swiftness of time and the shortness of life. That causes him to also meditate on his transgressions. In God he finds forgiveness for his sins, encouragement for the present, and hope for the future. So can we all.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Eternal God, help us today to find comfort in Your timelessness. Teach us to use time wisely that we may be fit for eternity. In the name of Jesus Christ who is the same, yesterday, today and forever, amen.

## A KING GREATER THAN SOLOMON

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 10:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:42).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “The Half Has Not Been Told”

Often people are impressed by wealth. Sometimes we ourselves are impressed by wealth, though we probably should not be. Seldom are we impressed by wisdom. Often, we do not recognize wisdom. The visiting Queen of Sheba was impressed by both the wealth and the wisdom of Solomon. What is most remarkable is that she saw them as gifts from God to the Jewish king.

What can all of this possibly have to do with us? We never saw a King and probably never will. Many of us are not likely to be in the presence of enormous wealth. What then does it have to do with us? Two things, certainly. One is that we must thank God for what we do have and recognize Him as the giver of “every good and perfect gift” (James 1:17). It is also useful to put this text alongside the words of Jesus; behold, a greater than Solomon is here, (Matthew 12:42) If the Queen of Sheba marvelled at the wealth and wisdom of an earthly king, how can we be so bland in our response to the King of Kings. A greater than Solomon is here. He deserves our respect—and reverence. We must stand in awe of Him!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Forgive me, Lord, if I am ever casual about my relationship with You, or if I ever take for granted Your wealth, wisdom and love. Through Christ our Lord, amen.

May 17

## REVISITING THE FAMILIAR

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 23:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us"

"Familiarity breeds contempt" is the well-known line from Aesop's Fables. We could never hold Psalm 23 in contempt, no matter how familiar it may become to us. But our familiarity with it can lead us to miss the enormous impact of this psalm. There is a reason why Psalm 23 is the most familiar chapter in the Bible. It speaks to our human condition.

It may help to give us a refreshing look at this familiar psalm if we note where it is placed in the Hebrew hymnal. Psalm 22 which goes before it is the Crucifixion Psalm that Jesus quoted on the cross; a psalm that prophecies the death of Jesus. The psalm that follows, Psalm 24, takes us to Heaven on the coronation day of King Jesus. Between the cross and the crown, between the past and the future, is Psalm 23.

Someone said that the great advantage of travel is that when we return home we see the familiar as if we were seeing it for the first time. Let's try to do that with this precious chapter. As we read it, let's try to imagine that we have never read those words before; never met those ideas before. Let's get a new appreciation for our Shepherd!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, we so often feel like sheep without a shepherd. Today I ask that You will show me Your personal love and care. Let not my familiarity with Psalm 23 keep me from knowing and feeling the security I have in You. Help me to feel assured of Your presence. In the name of Christ our Lord, amen.



## THE LAW OF THE HARVEST

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 37:21-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I was young, and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread (Psalm 37:25, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "God Will Take Care of You"

There is a problem in this Psalm. It is in verse 25. We cannot say with David that we have never seen good people wanting food. There are several things to remember. One is that David is speaking of his own personal experience. Another is that this is poetry, not theology. A third is that exaggeration is common in Oriental speech and this may be a hyperbole (an intentional exaggeration for emphasis). A fourth is that we must compare this with Malachi and Solomon and Jesus and Paul (Malachi 3:10, Ecclesiastes 11:1, Luke 6:38, Galatians 6:7-10). All of them say that the one who gives, receives. In this psalm "the righteous" means "the generous." This is the law of the harvest. The one who sows sparingly reaps also sparingly (2 Corinthians 9:6). We should not be afraid to give, supposing that we ourselves will then be in want. God will take care of us. That is quite simply what David is saying.

We can say with David that we have never seen the righteous forsaken. It may have sometimes looked as if they were forsaken. They may have felt forsaken. Jesus felt forsaken on the cross, but He was not and we are not. The apostle Paul did not feel forsaken when he was in need (Philippians 4:11-13). We should not feel forsaken, either.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Forgive our lack of trust in You, O God. Help us never to put our trust in possessions, or in any earthly being. Help us to deepen our assurance of Your love. In Christ, amen.

**May 19**

## **THINK AHEAD**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 12:13-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (Luke 12:15, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Count Your Blessings”

We’ve all seen the sign made by an amateur who didn’t allow enough space to get it all in. The sign says “Think Ahead” but he has not allowed enough space for the last letter. The problem with the man in this parable is that he did not think ahead. That’s why he is called a fool.

He was not a fool because his lands produced a good harvest. It takes a wise man to do that. He was not a fool because he thought to store it rather than waste it. He was not a fool because he built a bigger barn. He was a fool because he thought only of the needs of his body and not at all for the needs of his soul. He was a fool because he thought only in terms of time and not at all in terms of eternity.

He never thought that he might give away some of his excess grain. He never thought to thank God for the increase. He never thought of the inner person. He never thought of death. While we should not be preoccupied with death, we should be prepared for death. We think him to be an unusual person, but Jesus said that everyone who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God is just like this man. No wonder the parable begins, “Be on your guard against greed.”

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Lord, forgive our selfishness and our shortsightedness. Teach us to trust in You and not to trust in treasure. Give us wisdom in caring for the earthly treasures You are allowing us to use. We ask it in Jesus’ name, amen.

## WHAT THE LORD SAYS

✓  
**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 17:5-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him (Jeremiah 17:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Search Me, O God"

I believe in prayer. I pray. I begin each day with prayer. I pray before I get out of bed: "Good morning Father in Heaven, thank You for. . . ." And then I express my gratitude for a night's rest, a comfortable place to sleep and His watch and care over me while I was asleep. And then I pray for the persons and projects about which I am concerned. But always I close with, "Thy will be done."

The patriarchs prayed, the prophets prayed, the apostles prayed, our Lord Jesus Christ prayed. We, too, should, as the apostle Paul said, "pray continually." How better can we know what God wants us to do or what He has to say to us? And when we do so, we are acknowledging Him to be our source of direction and purpose.

Read again our Scripture for the day, "Cursed is the one who trusts in man . . . blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him" (Jeremiah 17:5, 7, *New International Version*).

Is there any better way to start the day than to seek to know what the Lord says?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Begin the day with a prayer of thanks for God's care. Ask for wisdom to know and understand His will and for strength to carry it out. Close the day, when you've put the body to rest, with another prayer of thanks for His help this day.

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May 20-26. **Bruce Miller** has worked for many years in the leadership of the church and is presently a Senior Adult Pastor in Mesa, Arizona.

**Onnalee Grimes** is an elder at the Broadway Christian Church in Tucson, Arizona.

May 21

## LISTEN!

**SCRIPTURE:** Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Would Be True"

Prayer should be a two-way communication. When we pray, we should talk to and listen to, God. Worship should be two-ways, also. When we worship God, we should give thanks, praise, petition and listen. The words of our Scripture for today in Ecclesiastes 5:1 (*New International Version*) are very pointed and plain: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen. . . ."

Sometimes, perhaps much too often, this attitude is absent in our present day services of worship. Prelude music meant to prepare us to worship is thought of as music to talk by.

Sometimes "special music" or skits or readings are entertainment rather than aids to worship.

Sometimes the prayers in our services are sermonettes explaining things to God. Doesn't He already know?

How very significant are the words of our Scripture in Ecclesiastes 5:2, (*New International Version*), "Do not be quick with your mouth, . . . let your words be few."

The Psalmist said it well, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14, *New International Version*).

Maybe sometimes we miss the still, small voice of God because we talk too much and listen too little.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Today when you pray, remember, "Be still, and know that I am God."

## DOES THE FATHER GOD REALLY CARE?

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 32:4-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “God Will Take Care of You”

There are some people who cannot love God or believe that God loves them if He (God) is like a father. How very sad, but unfortunately, how very true for some. I know of a family with six children whose father, during the terrible days of the depression of the 1920's, simply left—abandoned them. The mother worked several jobs days and nights to care for those children. I've counselled a young woman with several children to leave her brutal husband who abused her and the children. Almost every newscast and daily newspaper reports ugly stories of fathers who do not love their children and who certainly are not loving or deserving to be loved.

Is God the Father like that? Of course not! But there are innocent and unlearned people who do not know that.

I am so very grateful that I can think of God as a loving Father because of the loving earthly father I had!

Jesus said it best of all, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, *New International Version*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You Father in Heaven for the magnificent, loving father I had whose love for me helped me to understand the meaning of the love of God, the Father. Help fathers today to show love and compassion for their children. Help us to know that You are indeed the perfect Father. In Jesus' name, amen.

May 23

## GOD'S HOLINESS—MAN'S COMMISSION

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 6:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Go and tell this people: . . . (Isaiah 6:9, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Holy, Holy, Holy”

God commands—man obeys. At least, that's the way it is *supposed* to be. Isaiah, the obedient prophet said, “Send me.” And, he went.

A local church won a prize for their float entry in a community parade. Their float displayed a replica of the Ten Commandments with an attached banner that read “The Ten Suggestions—NOT.” That, too, is the way it is supposed to be—and is for those of us who believe that God is holy and sovereign!

However, belief alone is not good enough to fulfill the intent and purpose of God or Isaiah wouldn't have volunteered and the Apostle James wouldn't have said, “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good: Even the demons believe that—and shudder!” (James 2:19, *New International Version*).

Yes, God is holy and, yes, we are unholy. But just as Isaiah had his guilt taken away and his sin atoned for by the touch of the live coal on his lips, we can have our guilt taken away and our sin atoned for by our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You, Holy God, the Creator of the universe.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Mighty God, cleanse and prepare us to be Your witnesses. Send us to tell the good news. Guide us to be the servants You want us to be. In the name of our Savior, amen.

## I PRAY FOR YOU

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:14-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** . . . Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers (Ephesians 1:15, 16, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O, How He Loves You and Me"

It took me awhile to get over being uncomfortable when someone would say, "I'll pray for you." It wasn't because I didn't believe in prayer. Rather, I think, it was because the phrase sounded artificial and mechanically pious and insincere, like one hears, "Have a good day," at the end of a commercial telephone call or from the cashier person at the supermarket.

In time and after many years of hospital calling and being asked countless numbers of time to pray for someone, I began to think, *people really do want to be prayed for and to pray for someone else.*

With maturity-onset and growth in my prayer life, I discovered I was thinking of and praying for people by name. For many years now I have prayed daily for my family, parents, children, grandchildren, friends, fellow Christians, national, state and local leaders by name.

And now when someone says, "I'm praying for you," I feel good about it and say, "Thank you!"

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Merciful God, fill us with Your Spirit, and enable us to understand the depth of Your love. Help us to love You with the strength of our being. Help us to feel Your power in our lives as we speak to You through prayer. In the name of Jesus, amen.

**May 25**

## **GOD'S RESPONSE TO A KING'S PRAYER**

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Chronicles 7:14-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord appeared to him at night and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices (2 Chronicles 7:12, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Open My Eyes, That I May See"

Do kings and presidents and governors and congressmen and mayors pray? Many tell us that they do. I should like to think that they do. I hope that they do. I pray for them.

It is said that Abraham Lincoln told people he went to God in prayer because he had nowhere else to go.

How He answers prayer is entirely up to God. Whether or not He attaches conditions to answering prayers is also up to Him. However, He allows us to speak to Him at any time.

What I need to do is pray without attaching conditions as to when and where and how God is to answer my prayers.

God's response to King Solomon's prayer ought to serve as a reminder to us of our share in the partnership of prayer. Solomon prayed. God heard and answered the prayer. Solomon failed to fulfill his share of the partnership. Prayer is not like an ATM machine where we punch in our request and expect to get what we request. Addressing God in prayer is entering into an active partnership with the Giver and Sustainer of life.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God of love, forgive our foolish ways and heal our land. Help us to realize Your will in our lives. Teach us to pray for those that You have allowed to be in leadership of our country, our communities and our churches. In Jesus' name, amen.



## HOW DO WE LEARN TO PRAY?

SCRIPTURE: Luke 11:1-13

VERSE FOR TODAY: Lord, teach us to pray, . . . (Luke 11:1, *New International Version*).

HYMN FOR TODAY: "My Jesus, I Love Thee"

Do you pray? When did you start to pray? Who taught you to pray? Have you thought to express your gratitude to the person who taught you to pray?

Jesus, on request, taught his disciples to pray. We sometimes call what he taught them *The Lord's Prayer*. It is probably more accurate to describe what He said as the prayer Jesus taught them to pray—a model.

It is a model: it begins with a reverent address to God; acknowledges His will and our submission to it; expresses our physical needs; asks God's forgiveness of our sins coupled with our willingness to forgive those who offend us and pleads for God's guidance for our lives. We need to pray the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Having learned to pray we need to teach and encourage others to pray. Lord Tennyson was correct when he wrote, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

How very rewarding it will be someday to have someone, or several someones, say to us, "Thank you for teaching me to pray, encouraging me to pray and modeling a life of prayer."

The Apostle James said, ". . . pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16, *New International Version*).

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Heavenly Father, we would be true to Thee in thought, word and deed. This day, O God, help us to guard the words that we utter. May we glorify You and be an example to those who know us as Christians. In Christ's name, amen.

May 27

## WHAT MAKES A PERSON WISE?

**SCRIPTURE:** Job 28:12-23

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Proverbs 9:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “God of Grace and God of Glory”

What makes a person wise?

Previous generations equated wisdom with age and experience. Today the old are considered to be behind the times.

Often people equate wisdom with knowledge, and look to the number of degrees after a person's name.

Some people feel that fame is an indication of wisdom. It is inconsistent to ask celebrities who have been through several divorces to give advice on love and marriage, yet it is done.

Human wisdom has several components and needs to be developed. Education is not the same as wisdom, but it has a part in its development, so we should beware of making the opposite mistake of rejecting all “book-learnin’.” Another component is experience, and we should not reject history or the advice of the aged, but should prize them.

However, valuable as these things may be, we must remember that they are fragmentary and fallible. The ultimate source and foundation of true wisdom is not found in any of these things, but in God and His Word.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our Father, as we face a troubled and confusing world, we ask for wisdom. Give us the knowledge we need to understand the situations we face. But let us not have knowledge alone, but true wisdom, firmly based on our relationship with You and understanding of Your Holy Word. Amen.

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May 27, 28, and 30. **Benjamin Rees** and his wife, Karen, serve among the Philippine people who live in Hong Kong. They have two children.

## FAITH REQUIRES FAITHFUL LIVING

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 John 5:13-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Search Me, O God"

Some years ago it was briefly fashionable to have been "Born Again," and numerous public figures announced that they had experienced rebirth in Christ.

I remember reading at that time about the publisher of a pornographic magazine. He, too, declared that he had been born again. But he continued to publish the magazine and said that he didn't see any inconsistency in doing so.

In more recent years, surveys have shown that in North America there is little difference between the lifestyles of most people who attend church and of those who don't. Church-goers and non-church-goers watch the same television shows and rent the same videos. Church-going teenagers and non-church-going teenagers are almost equally likely to engage in the same type of lifestyle. Considering the serious decline in general moral standards in recent years, these are sad statistics.

In 1 John 5:18, 19 the Apostle John says that these things should not be. Those who have been born of God will live lives different from the rest of the world. And he states in 1 John 5:16 that if we see other Christians sin, we should not pass it off as "none of our business," but should pray for them.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** When people compare your lifestyle with that of your neighbors, can they detect the difference Christ has made? If not, ask God's forgiveness and ask Him to transform you into one that will be a witness to God's Spirit within you.

May 29

## NO EPITAPH

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 90:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

My husband and I like to wander through old cemeteries and read the epitaphs on the tombstones. Once, in Akron, Ohio, we found the grave of the man who invented the player piano, or so his gravestone stated.

One of my favorite epitaphs, from a 17th century book, is that of a Puritan locksmith. His epitaph reads:

"A zealous locksmith died of late,  
And did arrive at heaven gate,  
He stood without and would not knock,  
Because he meant to pick the lock."

Epitaphs, like the one above, give a tantalizing glimpse of the person buried there. The time span between the tombstone's birth and death dates ceases to be a void. Nevertheless, the dates are there, marking a beginning and an end.

History, like cemeteries, is filled with such people. History itself has a beginning and an end. Only God, standing outside of history, has no beginning or end.

He is the one who started history with the creation of the world. He will bring it to an end with the second coming. Only God has no epitaph.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Eternal Father and almighty God, thank You for being the creator and controller of history. Help me to use all my days, from birth to death, in Your service. In Christ I pray, amen.

## GOD'S LOVE INCLUDES DISCIPLINE

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 12:3-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent (Revelation 3:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord"

In the early '70's the movie *Love Story* popularized the saying, "Love means never having to say you're sorry." On the lips of someone who has been hurt, this sounds noble and forgiving. For the one who caused the hurt to say this would be arrogant and selfish. Yet people do argue that "if you loved me . . . you would overlook the harm I've done."

In the '80's and '90's there has been a major emphasis on tolerance. No doubt much of this has been good. There has been too much prejudice in the past. But I fear that the pendulum may have swung too far.

Some people feel that society has reached the point where we are now expected to approve of others absolutely without any conditions or qualifications. If we suggest that the other person needs to change in any way—including repenting of sins—we find that we are considered to be in the wrong. We are called arrogant bigots, guilty of trying to force our personal standards onto others.

God's Word tells us that sin is real and requires repentance. In today's Bible reading we are reminded that God's love is not only shown by forgiving sin, but also by disciplining sinners to bring them to repentance.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our God, we thank You that You love us enough to discipline us. Help us to recognize Your discipline when it comes and to reshape our lives according to Your will for us. Help us, dear Father, to show love and compassion to others. In Christ name, amen.

May 31

## HEEDLESS AND HASTY

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Timothy 1:3-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “More About Jesus”

A Chinese fable tells of three rulers. Shu (or Heedless) controlled the southern sea. Hu (that is, Hasty) ruled the northern sea. The ruler of the central zone was called Hun Tun, which means Formless. Heedless and Hasty often visited Formless. He treated them so well they decided to repay his kindness. They said, “All men have two holes for seeing, two each for breathing and hearing and one for eating. Formless has no holes. We’ll drill some for him.” So each day they drilled one hole, but on the final day Formless died.

Rulers in Chinese fables aren’t the only ones whose limited knowledge combined with over-confidence can bring disaster. In today’s passage, Paul talks of the dangers that this combination can bring to the church.

Like Heedless and Hasty, Paul’s troublemakers didn’t set out to intentionally create controversies. They seemed to have wandered from a sincere study of the Scriptures into a fascination for sensational and speculative subjects.

If we are to avoid the same mistake, we must humbly admit how much we still have to learn about God’s Word and never stop studying the Scriptures with a heart full of love, joy and compassion.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our heavenly Father, help us to open our hearts to Your truth, to apply it to our lives and to humbly share our knowledge with others. Teach us, O Father, to follow Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

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# DEVOTIONS

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## June

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photo by H. Armstrong Roberts

June 1

## WHAT ARE YOUR PRESUPPOSITIONS?

**SCRIPTURE:** Proverbs 3:5-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done (Romans 1:28, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "In Times Like These"

Rudyard Kipling, in his Jungle Books, has his tribe of monkeys state, "We all say so, so it must be true."

Today we might call this presupposition democracy. Giving everyone a say in matters is good for picking government officials, zoning laws and family vacation spots.

But people today apply this method to every aspect of life without realizing its limitations. If we all agreed that gravity didn't exist, would that rid us of gravity? The existence of some things isn't determined by public opinion.

Some people have agreed the God of the Bible doesn't exist. Modern man's belief that he can vote God out of existence leaves him with no other god but himself. As god, each man must decide what is true and right. Absolutes and objective truth no longer exist.

Much of the chaos in our world is a direct result of people thinking God can be voted away.

The writer of today's Scripture passage knew the dangers of putting our trust in our own understanding. Only as we trust in God and acknowledge His Lordship can we escape into peace and health. Let us build our lives on the right presuppositions.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our Father, give us wisdom and discernment so we won't be tricked by the world's false teachings. Anchor our minds and hearts in the truth of Your existence and Your love for us. In Christ we pray, amen.



## TOMBS

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 6:5-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” (Luke 24:5, 6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “He Lives”

Here in Hong Kong where my husband and I work, the Chinese festival of Ching Ming comes at Easter time. Ching Ming is a time for families to visit their ancestors' graves, tidying them up and paying their respects.

Unlike our western Memorial Day, Ching Ming activities include ancestor worship. Traditional Chinese religion holds that the living can't know what gods are “up there” but the dead, being so much closer to them, can know and can intervene on behalf of living descendants.

To insure the ancestors' help, families provide for the needs of the dead by offering food, hell money, and paper models of things like TV sets and servants. Once offered, the ancestors receive the equivalent in the afterlife.

Ching Ming is a time when people worship at occupied tombs. Our Christian Easter worship is at an empty tomb. This emptiness is proof of God's power over death and sin. This power isn't bought as the Chinese families buy the help of their ancestors. It is given freely to all who will receive it. All God asks in return is that we acknowledge this gift by our acceptance of Christ and by living our life for a personal knowable God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Father, for being a personal God with whom we can talk. Thank You for Your loving care and guidance. Help our actions to be acceptable in Your sight. In Christ's name we pray, **amen.**

June 3

## SINFUL ATTITUDES

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "A Passion for Souls"

In our community with its representatives from a wide spectrum of ethnic groups including Hispanics, Asians, and many others, the church reflects this diversity. Following one of our services a newer member of the church was greatly shocked and saddened to overhear one of the older members of the congregation comment quite loudly, "Don't those people know this is a white church? Can't those people go to a church of their own kind?"

Fortunately, this negative, narrow, unkind, unchristian attitude does not prevail widely, and hopefully is rapidly disappearing, though all too slowly.

Unfortunately, it should not show its face at all, especially in the household of God. If the Son of God did not want people of every nation and tongue to be brought to a knowledge of salvation, why then the Great Commission to go into every nation and preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15)?

Prejudice of every and any kind is a difficult attitude to remove from one's heart. But its removal is absolutely necessary if we are to enjoy the precious, pure fellowship with Him who made us and saved us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, may the words we learned in childhood, "Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in Your sight" remind us that we all are Your beloved children. Amen.

## THE HAMMER

**SCRIPTURE:** Leviticus 19:15-19

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Do not hate your brother in your heart (Leviticus 19:17, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "May the Mind of Christ, My Savior"

Twenty-two years ago, on a beautiful spring day, major league baseball player, Henry "Hank" Aaron, known popularly as "The Hammer," went to bat and connected with his 715th home run, besting Babe Ruth's long-standing record. Most people knew it would happen. Strangely, many people did not want it to happen, mainly because of racial prejudice. Aaron recently revealed he received scores of hate letters calling him every name in the book. He also admits his bitterness and resentment over this unwarranted prejudice was very slow in being quenched, but time has healed his wounds.

Why do we hate our brothers in our hearts? Are we so jealous of our own accomplishments, or afraid that others will receive more praise and recognition than ourselves? It is a basic Bible teaching that God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth (Acts 17:26). No one race or nation of people can claim superiority over any other.

In giving honor to others for their significant accomplishments is to reflect upon our own sense of worth and value.

Hank Aaron's record still stands, one of the greatest in baseball history. Let us honor those to whom honor is due.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, along our course of life we, with thousands of others, will receive recognition for deeds accomplished. May we be gracious givers as well as receivers of deserved recognition, through the grace of Jesus. Amen.

June 5

## CURSES VERSUS OBEDIENCE

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 27:15-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Obey the Lord your God and follow His commands and decrees that I give you today (Deuteronomy 27:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Purer in Heart, O God"

It may be very startling for us steeped in the teachings of the New Testament to read our Scripture for today. We have been taught time and again both by Jesus and His apostles that we should bless and curse not (Romans 12:14). It is equally true, however, that God, the righteous one, cannot tolerate sin in any form. So we read of the many curses that are the lot of those who refuse to walk the path of righteousness.

In analyzing this "catalog of curses," there emerges a strong echo of the Ten Commandments which governed the people of God then, and which are valid for us today. Those commandments have to do with our relationships to the property and persons of others. They impact our respect for human life. Our obedience to God's divine laws will more readily assure us of our own happiness, and that of others, as well.

Many of the darkest memories of life have centered on those episodes when we have mistreated and maligned others either thoughtlessly or with deliberate attempts to do harm. With genuine repentance available to us, our hearts can be cleansed and made whole again. Thank God for that privilege today.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** "Purer in heart, O God, help me to be, May I devote my life wholly to Thee. Watch Thou my wayward feet, Guide me with counsel sweet; Purer in heart, Help me to be" (from today's hymn). In the name of Jesus, my Savior, I pray. Amen.

## DARK MEMORIES

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 15:1-5

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? . . . He . . . who . . . has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow man (Psalm 15:1, 3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "True-Hearted, Whole-Hearted"

One of the "dark memories" of my boyhood days centered on an episode as I was walking with a group of three other friends. Coming toward us was another boy with a very peculiar, awkward, labored stride. As he passed by us, I started to snicker and commented loudly enough for the boy to hear, "Look at him. He's waddling like a duck!" Instantly, one of my friends turned on me angrily and said, "Be quiet! I know him. He's had polio and almost died from it. The doctor said he would never walk again. He's brave enough to be walking at all!" Completely ashamed and chagrined, I turned back to the boy and apologized for my stupid remark.

I learned a valuable lesson which has remained with me to this day. One must not judge another person on how he looks or walks or talks or dresses. We may not know the circumstances under which that other person lives or the problems which he faces.

We have enough difficulty in our daily walk as Christians to maintain a pure heart, a kind tongue and a truthful disposition without adding problems to other people by our behavior toward them.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God in Heaven, we are grateful today for the cleansing power of forgiveness, enabling us by Your grace to relieve the penalty of sin and shame. May we guard our tongues carefully that we speak no ill to our neighbors. Through Christ Jesus our Lord, amen.

**June 7**

## **DESTROYING EACH OTHER**

**SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 5:13-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (Galatians 5:15, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I'll Live For Him"

Man's inhumanity to man was visibly and horribly demonstrated some time ago in Central Africa when valiant Christian missionaries were torn between remaining at their posts in the area of Rwanda and being slain in inter-tribal warfare or fleeing for their lives. Describing the conflict, one veteran missionary, Ron Clark reported, "The horror is that many of the people who are killed are killed because of the shape of their noses," the only distinguishing characteristic of the enemy.

It is difficult for us to grasp the reality of such actions. Yet the apostle Paul warns us in our Scripture that the sinful nature is capable of such terrible things.

What is the Christian solution to such destruction? The Scripture gives us an answer, "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:16). When the Holy Spirit of God resides in one's heart, all the fruit of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, and kindness, will prevent us from engaging in destructive behavior.

Does the fruit of the Spirit live in us?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father-God, may we exercise the Golden Rule of doing unto others as we would have them do unto us in all our relationships. Thank You for giving to us the example of Jesus Christ to follow. In His name we pray. Amen.

## FORGIVENESS WEEK

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 2:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Do nothing out of selfish ambition, or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves (Philippians 2 3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "If I Have Wounded Any Soul Today"

I recently became aware of the existence of "Forgiveness Week" observance. In recognition of the week, Robert Muller, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, wrote an impressive piece entitled, "Decide to Forgive." Decide to forgive for resentment is negative, resentment is poisonous. Resentment diminishes and devours the self. Be the first to forgive, to smile, and to take the first step and you will see happiness bloom on the face of your brother or sister. Be always the first; do not wait for others to forgive, for by forgiving you become the master of fate, fashioner of life, and doer of miracles. To forgive is the highest form of love.

In return you will receive untold peace and happiness. Here's the program: Sunday: Forgive yourself; Monday: Forgive your family, Tuesday: Forgive your friends and associates, Wednesday: Forgive those across economic lines; Thursday: Forgive across cultural lines; Friday: Forgive across political lines; Saturday: Forgive other nations. Only the brave know how to forgive. A coward never forgives. It is not in his nature."

Christ is willing to forgive us our sins. Should we not find it possible to forgive others as well?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Gracious Forgiver of my sins through Your Son's death on the cross, thank You. May I follow Your example in forgiving those who may have wronged me or others. In the name of Jesus, my Savior, amen.

June 9

## BEAUTIFUL MUSIC

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 14: 10-23

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification (Romans 14:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee"

When I lived in southern Illinois several years ago, the state mental hospital located in Anna sponsored an annual one-day ministers' seminar climaxed in the evening with a lovely banquet and dinner music. I have never forgotten this one occasion when a seven-member stringed ensemble, dressed in formal wear, played some of the most beautiful and difficult pieces "this side of heaven." We sat enthralled, absorbing the exquisite sounds. At the end of the program, we learned in utter amazement that all were patients in the hospital, some confined for several years. Though hampered with a variety of emotional disorders, their love of, and expertise in, classical music shone through brilliantly.

Is there not a lesson in this for us? I have yet to meet a person who did not enrich my life in some way or another. There is no room in our short span on this earth to rank down or disparage other people. Even as we feel we can contribute something of worth to others, so likewise others can contribute to our understanding and well-being. In so doing, we will find "peace and mutual edification."

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, if I have wounded any soul today, if I have caused one foot to go astray, if I have walked in my own willful way, dear Lord, forgive. Forgive the sins I have confessed to Thee; Forgive the secret sins I do not see; O Guide me, love me, and my Keeper be, dear Lord. (from *An Evening Prayer*). Amen.



## FAITH-REFINED FAMILIES

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 22:9-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together (Genesis 22:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "God Will Take Care of You"

My son Steve lunged sideways and deflected a soccer ball from the goal. Then an opponent's knee caught and fractured his nose. The doctor assured us that the break was minor but added that we might want to pursue cosmetic surgery if it remained crooked.

I doubted that our medical plan would cover such surgery and, "What if I can't afford it? Some of Steve's good looks would be as good as dead. Would he hold it against me? Worse yet, would he begrudge the Lord our regular tithes as the reason we lacked money for surgery?"

Every time we give the Lord time and money we make tough, Abrahamic decisions. Will it deprive our children of advantages and shut them out of opportunities? We can only hope that our children will not miss the greatest opening of all: learning to trust God.

Shortly after the fracture, Steve handed me money to give to church. He had forgotten to give in his offering on Sunday and didn't want to hold it any longer lest he be tempted to spend it.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty Provider, when our deep-seated desires are to survive and protect our loved ones, grant us the wisdom and courage to temper those instincts with such a confident commitment to You that our family's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ may be ever more purely refined. Amen.

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June 10-16. Gary Anderson ministers in Emmett, Idaho. For many years he served among the Chinese people in Hong Kong. He and his wife, Joyce, have three children, Sandra, Steven, and David.

**June 11**

## **LOVE'S SPILL OVER**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 25:31-46

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Make Me a Blessing"

Six godly men and myself driving across Kenya pulled over near the equator to take pictures of snow-capped Mount Kenya. Three boys in tatters walked up hoping for handouts like an overwhelming number of others we had encountered. They were singing and playing mournful-sounding tunes on violins. The violins were each handmade of a coffee can, a stick and two strings of twine. The boys played them with pieces of PVC pipe. At first, the men were reluctant to give them more than some bananas and a coin or two.

Then our host struck up a conversation with them in Swahili and translated the following parts of it to us. "What language are you singing in?" "Kiswahili." "And what is this song?" "Our own praises of the Lord Jesus. We sing nothing else."

At once the men's attitudes toward the boys brightened. Whatever affection they may have lacked for these strangers, by faith they knew and loved Jesus, and here were fellow believers in Christ though certainly among the least. The men delayed continuing our trip long enough to compliment the boys for their ingenuity and commitment to Jesus and to encourage them generously.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear heavenly Father, may our love for the Lord Jesus grow ever richer each day so that it encompasses more of the least of our brothers and sisters, may we express our love to those around us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

## ENDOWED TO BE ENDOWING

**SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 3:6-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:14, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Channels Only”

The two four-wheel-drive vehicles carrying us and a Kawasaki 650 dirt bike turned off the pavement at Lodwar, Kenya, into the fading twilight on choking, hot sand dunes. One vehicle was stuck within minutes. Once freed, the only sign for nearly an hour that we were on a traveled path was the dip through the dunes.

Our host's hunches in the utter darkness brought us safely to our goal. It was a house all too often invaded by sandstorms, powered by solar panels and dependent on hand-carried water. It was the home of a former Long Island chemist with The Revlon Company, Kurt Bruens, his wife Debbie, and their two little girls.

We had come to visit and encourage them and to bring them vegetables. In return, they endowed us with a lasagna meal fit for the finest restaurant. Kurt's example was more notable. He gave up his lucrative career to be in this place because they were enjoying the blessed redemption that was promised beforehand to Abraham and comes through faith in Christ. This endowment propelled them to bring it to the primitive Turkana nation, who were woefully estranged from God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Eternal Giver of all that is good and perfect, may we find so much delight in the endowment that comes down to us from Abraham through faith in Christ that we can not rest except in passing this endowment on to those who do not yet enjoy it. Amen.

**June 13**

## **FEAR-FIRED FAITH**

**SCRIPTURE:** Joshua 2:1-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below (Joshua 2:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "It Is Well with My Soul"

Historically, those in power are often there because they are the most intimidating. Yet in totalitarian China the following incongruity is repeated millions of times.

I was invited to speak words of encouragement to a small group of key Christians in China. Several strikes were against the meeting taking place. When China issued the visa to me, they also warned me in writing not to attend church or to preach. It was illegal for a Chinese national to possess any religious material printed outside of the country. The would-be attenders all had police records of being investigated, interrogated or detained for religious activities, or were the friends of those who had. They knew that a sentence could include loss of right to work, exile from one's family and hometown and even torture. A big Caucasian like myself would draw extremely risky attention to them.

Still, they met in a hotel room. The son of the local head of security stuck his head into the meeting briefly. Still, they shared words of godly encouragement, sang hymns and shared in the Lord's Supper.

Why? Their awe for the Lord Jesus Christ surpassed any fears they might have of intimidation by human authorities.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty Lord, as Rahab's awe of You overcame her fear of reprisals for harboring enemy spies, may our faith in You inspire such awe that ungodly intimidation will not sway us off. Amen.

## SUSTAINED FAITH YIELDS RESULTS

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:29-39

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Hebrews 10:36, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Find Us Faithful"

Atheism began vigorously persecuting Christians in China by 1951. Countless Christians were dispersed, tortured and killed, and meeting places were confiscated and destroyed.

The Lord's determined Hong Kong servants promptly began petitioning Him unfailingly each Friday in the Peninsula Hotel for His people in China. The meetings during those first few years were regularly swelled by fleeing missionaries with new tragic accounts.

I began attending the meetings some twenty-two years later. The news of Christ's people in China throughout those years had been scant and bleak. Helplessness pervaded the meeting. The moderator, John, asked for evidence that the church was still viably alive in China. None could respond. Then one elder lady softly replied. She had been there before the persecution began. She had seen the Holy Spirit work. She was certain the Lord had not abandoned His saints there.

Within months, crumbs of news became a trickle, then a stream, then a torrent. It seems that the ranks of the believers in Christ in China has been swelling to some thirty times what it was before the persecution began. And what now all the more of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty Father, seeing that You surround us with so great a cloud of living evidence, we bow before You ashamed of the times when our faith has been short-sighted. Cleanse us, we beg, unto renewed vigor for the missions You are giving us this day. Amen.

June 15

## LOVING, LEGAL OR LOOSE?

**SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 5:2-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Galatians 5:6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Make Me a Channel of Blessing"

When I was a high school freshman, I used my study hall to become just what the Lord desired. I started underlining every New Testament command or directive in red. I am leafing through that Bible now, and I see that my plan fizzled just as I thought. I gave it up when I realized I couldn't possibly remember all the commands in order to keep them.

It took me much longer to learn the real truth. Focusing on a multiplicity of commands is doomed to fail. Real godliness is generated by the Lord's grace, propelled by our faith in it and manifest in our love to Him and all whom He gives us to love.

Codes of conduct are dangerously flawed yardsticks of our rapport with anyone, much more so with the Lord. They imbue those who measure up with false glee and those who don't with false gloom.

Comedian Red Skeleton reportedly learned that. It seems he gave poetry, flowers or cards to his wife daily for twenty-some years. His conduct may have convinced him that he deserved her love, but it didn't convince her. She left him—reportedly because she was bored by it all.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, You know our propensity to substitute either legalism or laxity for love. May this moment be the beginning of a rich walk with You today, guided and restrained by Your wisdom and strength to more greatly manifest Your love to all whom we meet today. Help us to express our love for You through our faith in You. Amen.

## FAITH AND AUTHORITY

**SCRIPTURE:** Mark 6:7-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

“How,” I asked this eager Chinese Christian man sitting in front of me, “did you get interested in Christ?” His response was spine-tingling.

“I was the member of a kungfu club that was actually an organized crime brotherhood,” he said. “A barmaid I knew was turning to Christ and urged me to go with her to church, but I brushed her off.”

“Shortly thereafter, our brotherhood held a secret meeting. Big Brother confided that he had increased his invincibility by calling a powerful spirit into body. To prove its presence, he asked us to each secretly write a word on a paper and fold it up. He placed his hand on each piece of paper and told us exactly what the word was.”

“So I thought to write *Shangti*, the Chinese name of the Christian God, on a piece of paper and see what happened. He put his hand on it and was immediately tossed to the floor. Again he tried with the same effect. Everyone asked him what was happening. He said that a more powerful spirit was forbidding him from saying that word. Then I knew that this God was much feared even by mighty spirits.”

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty God, what a joy it is to know that in this world where there is so much that seems to defy both our abilities and our understandings we can rest confidently and securely in Your hands no matter into what circumstances You may lead us this day. Thank You for the power we have in You. Amen.

June 17

## THE SOURCE OF WISDOM

**SCRIPTURE:** Job 28:12-22, 28

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He said to man, The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding (Job 28:28, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I’ve Discovered the Way of Gladness”

Today, many native Hawaiians are very active in seeking a homeland for themselves. They are working to get the state and federal governments to restore to them at least part of the land that they lost when “mainland” businessmen and government came to the islands. Coupled with this, some of them are reviving the old pagan worship practices, thinking that in so doing they can somehow return to the way things were long ago. But freedom and restoration will not be found that way. They’re looking in the wrong place. Only Jesus Christ can bring restoration and freedom.

Where do we look for wisdom? Mining deep in the earth produces jewels and precious metals. But where can you dig for wisdom? Not in the ground. Not in the sea. Wisdom cannot be bought with money. It’s priceless. It’s beyond comparison in value. But where does it dwell?

Job gives the answer. God is the Source of wisdom, and the fear of the Lord brings wisdom to mankind. When we have a saved relationship with God, then we are tied into the Source of all wisdom and knowledge. God will then share His wisdom with us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father in Heaven, I know that in You all wisdom and truth resides. Please open my eyes to see Your truth for this day, for this hour, for every experience of life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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June 17-23. Donnie Mings and his wife, Charlotte, are former missionaries to Japan. They now serve the Hauula Church of Christ, Hauula, Oahu, Hawaii.



## THE MESSIAH AND WISDOM

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 11:1-5

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (Ephesians 1:17, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Open My Eyes”

There are some trees that seem determined to survive no matter what you do to them. You cut them down to where there's only a stump left. A few weeks later you notice a little green shoot starting to grow out of the side of the stump. The tree wants to go on living.

In today's Scripture the stump or stock represents the Davidic monarchy, the long succession of kings, beginning with David, who ruled over Judah. That monarchy was eventually cut off by the Babylonians. But God had promised David there would always be one to rule after him. The baby Jesus was the little green shoot that grew out of the severed trunk. He became the eternal King on David's throne.

Upon Jesus Christ, the Messiah pictured here, was the Holy Spirit; the Spirit characterized by wisdom and understanding; the One who represents and holds wisdom as a precious treasure. Because of this anointing, every word Jesus spoke was purposeful and effective. He spoke with authority and understanding. And everyone stopped to listen.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear all-wise Father, thank You for loving me and caring for me even though You know everything about me, including all of my faults. By Your Spirit, please give me wisdom and understanding to know You better. In the name of Jesus the Christ, amen.

June 19

## THE AMAZING NAZARENE

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 13:53-58

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I tell you the truth, he continued, no prophet is accepted in his hometown (Luke 4:24, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “My Savior’s Love”

The people of Nazareth thought they knew the young man, Jesus. They had watched Him grow up. He had played in the streets with the other children. He had visited them in their homes. They knew His grandparents. They knew His mother, and they thought they knew His father. They had seen Him at his father’s carpenter shop many times. They knew His brothers and sisters. He looked very ordinary. As Isaiah had said, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.” He had not gone away to study at the great centers of learning, but had remained close to home until He was thirty years old. Now He was speaking with fantastic wisdom, and He had miraculous powers. What’s going on here! They couldn’t understand it. Where did He get these abilities?

Obviously they didn’t know Him as well as they thought. God was living among them as a man, and all they saw was a man. At first they were amazed. Then they were puzzled. Then they decided they didn’t like Him. They couldn’t believe He was the Son of God. And that lack of belief hindered their being helped by Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, You are all-powerful and all-wise. I need Your advice and guidance every day, every hour. I cannot live a life of happiness without Your wisdom. I trust You for it. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior and Guide, I pray. Amen.

5-2-99

June 20

## OBEYING GOD IS WISE

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 7:21-28

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Trust and Obey"

Most of us know of a person who has acquired a great deal of education, who seems to be very intelligent and bright, but who has a hard time making it in day-to-day life. He or she has a lot of knowledge, but very little wisdom. There is a difference. The person without wisdom makes a lot of mistakes in life. He can't relate well to other people, and often he seems to be lost in the world. In today's Scripture, Jesus offers the solution to the problem. Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man . . . (Matthew 7:24, *New International Version*). Obeying God is wise.

Statistics tell us that many Americans believe in the God of the Bible. Most people have some idea of what God requires. They believe that the Bible is God's Word, and they know God has made some rules for living. But putting those rules into practice is another matter. Obedience is lacking. That is foolish, Jesus said. Wise people not only hear the Word of God, but they also put it into practice. Simply knowing is not enough. Most people wouldn't think of building a house on the sand. But many are willing to build their lives on it. Without obedience to God, our lives are on very shaky ground.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, I choose to obey You because I want to obey, because of my commitment to You, and because I know it is dangerous to disobey. Help me to put Jesus' words into practice. In His name, amen.

**June 21**

## **GOD'S GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING**

**SCRIPTURE:** Daniel 1:17-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Then men will say, "Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth" (Psalm 58:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I'll Put Jesus First in My Life"

Daniel had three friends who really loved the Lord and were determined to serve Him. This is shown very clearly in chapter three of the Book of Daniel when the three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refused to bow down to the pagan image. They were even threatened with death in the fiery furnace, and still they remained faithful to God.

There are many important things in this world to which we can commit time and effort. We can commit much of ourselves to our jobs, our education, much needed social work around us, and the environment. Most people are committed to at least one thing in life, often wholeheartedly. But nothing has the eternal satisfaction and fulfillment that a commitment to the Lord can bring. Our commitment to the Lord brings many rewards even in this world.

God rewarded Daniel and his three friends with superhuman wisdom and understanding. The Bible says they were ten times smarter than all the magicians and enchanters in the whole kingdom of Babylon. Today God wants to bless us also with wisdom when we're really committed to Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, even as You rewarded Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, by giving them great wisdom, so also make me wise as I seek to serve You. Teach me to have a faith like these young men. May I be willing to trust You in all things. In Jesus' name, amen.

## GOD'S SECRET WISDOM

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Corinthians 2:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began (1 Corinthians 2:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "More About Jesus"

As small children we learn to avoid touching a hot stove. We discover that when a glass falls to the floor, it breaks. As we are taught what is right and what is wrong by our parents, and as we experience situations in life, we gain knowledge. Wisdom is knowing how to use that knowledge and putting what we know into practice.

Man's wisdom is limited to what we can learn from experience or speculation concerning the material and nonmaterial aspects of the universe. As man searches for the truth, many theories and philosophies are developed. These theories and philosophies change. This includes religions of the world which result from man's search for God. But God is not found that way. He has revealed Himself to us through His Word and the world in which we live, and through Jesus Christ.

When God revealed Himself to man, real truth and wisdom came for the first time. God in Christ revealing Himself to the world—that's Christianity. Man's wisdom is temporary and very limited. The wisdom we find in God and His plan for the world is eternal and does not change. God's wisdom comes with power, and brings salvation to all mankind. We need simply to accept Him and obey His Word.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear heavenly Father, thank You for revealing Yourself to mankind through Your Son, Jesus Christ. I want to get to know You much better. Please help me to search for You in Your holy Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

**June 23**

## **THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD**

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness" and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile" (1 Corinthians 3:19, 20, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"

Imagine two little children playing in a sandbox, chatting about where sand comes from. One of them says that sand falls from the sky like rain. The other disagrees. He thinks sand has to be grown by farmers in a field. An adult coming along and hearing their childish talk laughs and dismisses their thinking as cute, but silly and ignorant.

I sometimes wonder if God just looks at man's so-called wisdom and shakes His head. "That's not even cute," He says, because too much of the time man's wisdom tries to leave God out. Paul tells us in today's Scripture that the wisdom of this world, even though we may respect it and even depend on it, is actually foolishness in God's sight. Even the smartest man or woman alive is a dummy before God. All of our learning and knowledge is simply childish thinking when compared to God's wisdom. Therefore we desperately need to hear what God wants to reveal to us. And because He loves us, He really does reveal the truth to us. When we study the Word of God, we find the truths that our Creator wants us to learn.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, thank You so much that You want to help me to be wise. Forgive my lack of wisdom, my sometimes foolish and childish ways. Help me to hunger after Your wisdom. Thank You for loving me and allowing me to belong to You. Through Jesus my Savior I pray, amen.

## EVERY BELIEVER A TEACHER ✓

**SCRIPTURE:** Job 27:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I will teach you about the power of God; (Job 27:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Pass It On"

The other day a student of mine asked why I was always so upbeat. That surprised me, for I didn't consider myself much different than most people. Then I began to observe the people I had contact with each day and found that many lived as though they were carrying a big weight and were about to collapse under the load. They did not seem to enjoy what they were doing. Some had nothing good to say about anything and many had a negative view of life. Everything was wrong. Nothing was right. I suppose all of us meet people like that each day of our lives.

The way we live is an opportunity to teach others about God and His power. If we live as though each moment of life is something to enjoy instead of a burden, we give testimony to our faith. Isn't it great to know that God created us and everything in the universe? He gives us daily pleasures of His Creation such as a beautiful flower, warm sunshine, freshness of rain, and even the solace of a heavy snowfall. As we praise God for all of life, others are drawn to ask why? Our answer is witness to our faith.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Lord God Almighty, help me to see the joy of life. Open my eyes, my whole life to the magnificence of Your creation and may my joy teach others about You. May I pass along to others the joy and excitement that I find in You. In the name of Jesus, my Savior, I pray, amen.

**June 25**

## **FULFILLING YOUR VOWS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 66:13-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vow to you (Psalm 66: 13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "All For Jesus"

I remember the day my dad took me to the automobile dealer to buy a car. He talked a long time with the dealer while I looked at the most beautiful car I had ever seen. When they were through talking they shook hands and I heard dad say, "I'll have the money for you by Friday." Then we drove off in our new car. In these days of multitude forms that must be prepared on any transaction, I find it hard to believe that a simple handshake was ever sufficient.

We all make promises or vows to God. We vow to obey Him in all that we do. God requires no written document or any complicated ritual, just our word. He is willing to trust us because He is trustworthy. He has promised to listen and respond to each of our prayers. He has promised to always love us through every happening in our life. God does expect us to live our lives in obedience to His Word. Every moment, every relationship, every event is to be given to God. When we do, we are blest with His Presence and Power.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O most merciful God, I thank You so much for loving me, for accepting my word to follow You. Give me the strength of Your Spirit in my life that I may be obedient in everything I do. Teach me to say and do what You would have me to do. "May Your ways be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations" (Psalm 67:2, *New International Version*). Thank You for the salvation I have in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.



## FOREVER IS A LONG TIME

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 John 2:12-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:17, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Surrender All"

Everyday brings more new electronic devices to the marketplace. Each year new car models are presented to the public. New fashions are paraded before us. One of my neighbors had to have the latest electronic developments. He spent much time keeping his car immaculately clean. He traded for a new car every two years. Then one day his son was driving and the car was wrecked. I believe the man showed more concern about his car than he did about his son's broken body.

It is so easy to become trapped by the things of the world whether it is the latest auto, fashion or just a small pocket radio or CD player. They may all be nice to have and they do make life more comfortable and enjoyable, but the important thing is our attitude toward them. It is easy for our desires to consume our life.

The Scripture today shows that our relationship with God is to be our number one priority. We are to spend our life doing His Will. If we are living as He wants, then we will live forever and ever with Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear almighty God, may my eyes be forever upon You and Your ways. Help me to put aside my desires for worldly things and guide me to desire only Your ways. Help me to look to You for guidance as I make my day-to-day decisions. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior, I pray. Amen.

June 27

## A REAL PICK ME UP

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 138:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; before the “gods” I will sing your praise. I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word (Psalm 138:1, 2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Praise To The Lord”

Sometimes the world just seems as if it’s too much to handle. Problems can come almost as fast as a speeding train. When this happens, I find that my natural reaction is to become depressed and moody. Before I became a Christian, I used to go on for days feeling unhappy and depressed. Now that I have found the cure for feeling as if the world is too much to handle; I praise God, and give my burdens to Him.

Praise is what God wants. It is our way of acknowledging that God is in charge of what is happening in the world even if it doesn’t please us. When we realize that God is in control, then He gives us the courage, the understanding, the strength to deal with our daily problems according to His way.

When I was told I had prostate cancer I was uncertain whether I should have it removed. At first it made me depressed and I wondered, “Why me?” Then I began to praise God, not because I wanted to but because He said to, and I was able to face surgery with boldness and an expectation that through this experience, I would grow spiritually . . . and I did.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** You are a mighty and good God. You are the one and only God and You can change despair into joy. I praise You with my whole heart. Help me to always seek You in all that happens. I praise You for the gift of life You give to me through Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

## A HAVEN OF GOOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Proverbs 3: 27-35

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous (Proverbs 3: 33, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "God Will Take Care of You"

The book of Proverbs gives instructions on how we act when we are living a godly life. Sometimes we may feel that being righteous may seem too far removed from daily living to be obtainable. The world surrounds us with many opportunities to be unrighteous. Sometimes we may feel that we have little control over our surroundings and give up trying to encourage others to live a godly life.

There is one area of life that we do have control over and that is our home. We can make our home a haven of good for our family. We can create an atmosphere which proclaims the Word of God in all that happens within our home. It can become a place where our children feel securely wrapped in love. A place where they can pour out their heart and know that it will be handled gently and tenderly. A place where they can seek wisdom in their daily walk. A place where they begin to experience the very presence of the living God. Such is the home that God desires. Regardless of what the world is like we can fill our home with the fruits of God's Spirit. In so doing we will receive God's manifold blessings.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** I praise and thank You for being a loving God. May Your Spirit abide in our home so we may experience Your presence in a new and exciting way and receive Your many blessings. Teach me, O Father, to fill my home and my heart with a positive attitude of love and righteousness. In the name of Jesus, my Savior, I pray, amen.

**June 29**

## **TRUST IN GOD FOR ALL THINGS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 55: 6-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways (Isaiah 55:9, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Marvelous Grace"

When I was a child I used to lie awake at night and watch the star lit night sky and wonder about how it was made. I knew that the creation of the stars and night sky was beyond anything that I could do or even imagine in my mind. All those stars scattered throughout the dark night sky, sparkling brightly as if trying to turn darkness into light. As I matured and learned about science and the theories of formation of the universe I'm afraid I lost much of that sense of wonder and awe.

Today when we consider that we know so much and yet we can't unravel some of the mysteries of life it makes God's ways even more awesome. The way our ecological system works, the creation of a human being, the complexity of an eye, the brain and its capability to reason, the creation of a single cell, all speak of the truth that God's ways are much beyond our own capabilities.

If we know God then we can trust Him to take care of us in all that happens. When God sent His Son Jesus to die for us He showed His unlimited grace. It is that grace that allows us to look forward to life eternal.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God of power and might I thank You and praise You for Your marvelous grace. Teach me, O Father, to trust in You and to allow You to lead me. Give me the wisdom that can come only from You. May Your Spirit help me today. Thank You for giving me life through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## CLIMBING THE HILL

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 24: 1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false (Psalm 24: 3, 4, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Redeeming Love"

I was sitting on my porch the other morning just as dawn was bursting forth, and I felt bathed in the peace and joy of God's creation. The birds were chattering away while the flowers were lazily opening their petals to another day. It felt good. However, it didn't last long. The duties, trials, and worries of my life soon crept in and that wonderful feeling of the presence of God floated away with the morning mist.

As I continued to sit on the porch I was reminded of today's Scripture in Psalms and how it proclaims that everything belongs to God the Creator. Can I ever enter the presence of the Lord? The answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

Everyone who claims God as Lord of life has the daily struggle of living a life of compassion, understanding, and patience in all that happens. One's faith must be strong and it must bring honor to God. It is not easy, for the ways of the world are different than God's ways. But if a believer can keep his hands clean and his heart pure he can climb the hill of the Lord and be in His presence.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty God, help me, a sinner, saved by Your grace, to live a life that is acceptable to You. Guide me in my daily walk that I might one day ascend Your hill and know Your complete presence. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

## My Prayer Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

# DEVOTIONS



## July

Eileen H. Wilmoth, Editor  
photo by H. Armstrong Roberts  
Volume 39

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**July 1**

## **THE LORD IS WORTHY OF PRAISE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 33:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing to the glory of His name; offer Him glory and praise (Psalm 66:1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Let's not be careless in our worship of Jehovah. He deserves our best. Worship is to express joy, gratitude and praise.

Jehovah's moral attributes furnish a sufficient reason for our worship. His message is right and true, and He is faithful in all that He has promised. These assurances bolster our confidence in Him. The psalmist rounds out the picture of the Lord by saying that, “The Lord loves righteousness and justice; and the earth is full of His unfailing love.” His unfailing love elicits our praise.

The Lord receives our praise because of His creative acts. Creation reveals His power and wisdom. The heavens and their starry host were brought into being by His Word, i.e., as the Lord willed. His creative acts are further stated in poetic form as this Psalm tells of the separation of the waters from the land. How could this have been accomplished? “He spoke, and it came to be, He commanded and it stood firm.”

It is appropriate for the righteous to joyously praise the Lord as He is worthy.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You for the beautiful world that You created and gave to us. In Your wisdom You have provided for our many needs. May we always be grateful and give honor and praise to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

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July 1-7. Merle Melton ministers with the University Christian Church in Coralville, Iowa. He and his wife, Martha, make their home in Iowa City.



## CREATIVE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 1:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (Hebrews 11:3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Praise the Lord! Ye Heavens, Adore Him"

The Lord Jehovah is the great I Am. He is the Eternal One. His existence was prior to all created things. "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalm 90:2, *New International Version*).

The Lord God brought the heavens and the earth into existence from out of nothing. But they were not created in their perfect state. Rather, the earth was without form. Emptiness and darkness were over the surface of the deep. Then, God began to perfect and complete His created world, and this He did in six days or six creative time periods.

God's first creative act was to bring light into being. God separated the light from the darkness. The light He called day, and the darkness He called night. Light was produced by God's all powerful Word. Light is essential for life and for our earthly existence.

God's second creative act was the formation of the sky. The sky is our atmosphere or layers of air. The atmosphere separates the waters that are above it from the waters beneath it.

The creative acts of day one and day two bear witness to the creative power of God's Word.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, may we not question Your existence, Your power or the power of Your Word. May we see in this created world the evidence of Your power and wisdom. Thank You for the planet earth and for this great universe. In Jesus' name, amen.

July 3

## LAND AND SEAS ARE FORMED

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 1:9-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe (Hebrews 1:3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “How Great Thou Art”

In Genesis, chapter one, the Almighty God is preparing the earth so that it will sustain vegetation and animal and human life. He has created light and the atmosphere, or skies, and these are necessary for all forms of life. This is the third day of creation. Water has covered the face of the earth. At God’s command, or in accordance with Jehovah’s will, the waters are gathered into one place and the dry land appears. The gathered waters He calls seas, or more specifically, oceans. The dry ground is called land.

One of the many marvels of God’s creation is that while oceans seem so vast compared to the land surface, the balance is right to supply rain for the earth’s surface. After the recession of water, the land surface begins to take shape. The crust of the earth grows stiff and mountain ranges appear.

God speaks once again, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees” (Genesis 1:11, *New International Version*). God places in motion the process for bringing into being all forms of vegetation: grasses, plants and fruit-bearing trees. These are God’s creative acts on the third day or in the third time period of history.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, as we come to better understand the wonders of Your creation, we marvel at Your power and wisdom revealed therein. Thank You for the perfection in the world You created. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## SUN AND MOON GOVERN THE EARTH

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 1:14-19

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands (Psalm 19:1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "The Spacious Firmament On High"

The earth was created originally in an incomplete form. Darkness and water covered the face of the earth. With each successive day of creation, the universe moved forward toward its completed state.

On day one light was created. Evidently this light emanated from the sun and moon which were not visible from earth. The gases, steam and vapors prevented their view. The surface of the earth was cooling and heat would be needed from an outside source. This cooling of the earth's surface and the clearing of the atmosphere, permit the sun, moon and stars to be visible from earth. It is further believed that the sun and moon were still being formed, and the heavenly bodies were moving into their positions where they have remained. The heavens, like the earth, were created in an imperfect state and were being perfected in this fourth day or creative period.

The sun and moon determine the seasons of the year and day and night, and they give light upon the earth. Light is essential for all forms of life on the earth—vegetable, animal and human.

We marvel at the detailed planning and the perfect integration of our universe. Praise God for His power and wisdom in doing all things well.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, we find satisfaction and assurance in knowing that You do all things well. Thank You, dear Father, for meeting all our needs and for giving to us strength, help, guidance and forgiveness. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

**July 5**

## **CREATION OF MARINE AND FOWL LIFE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 1:20-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Sing the Almighty Power of God”

Once again our devotion is dealing with the Scripture from Genesis one and it underscores two truths: God does nothing in haste and He does all things well. His creation is marvelous in its planning and integrated detail.

On the fifth day God created all life that moves in the waters and every winged bird that flies in the heavens.

There are some key factors regarding God’s creative work on the fifth day. The waters are to swarm with living creatures which emphasizes the abundance and variety of marine life. The next principle is that animal and plant life produce according to their own kind. The fifth creative period met with God’s approval. “And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:25, *New International Version*).

The first creative acts of God on the sixth day included livestock, creatures that move on the ground and wild animals, each according to its kind. The statement, “Let the land produce creatures” (Genesis 1:24, *New International Version*) is one that we do not understand.

The universe is now in its completed state and ready for human beings to live upon the earth.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, we marvel at Your power and wisdom revealed in the created universe. Thank You for the laws governing our world which are unchanging. Thank You for all forms of life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## MAN, GOD'S CROWNING CREATION

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 1:26-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:27, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "All Things Bright and Beautiful"

The world is like a stage. When everything on the stage is fully ready the actors and actresses appear. So it was with man. Man (male and female) was not created until the world was in complete readiness. "Then God said, Let us make man in our image and in our likeness."

The sixth day is the last creative period. Genesis 2:7 tells how God created man. "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being."

God created man. Man is a collective term. No sex gender is involved. All humanity, male and female, is created in the image of God. Being created in God's image means that all people have reason, free will and conscience. We are a reasoning, volitional people with the ability of knowing right and wrong.

Mankind was placed over God's creation, to subdue and have dominion over it. Also, they were told to multiply and replenish the earth.

The human race is the culmination of God's creation. Each creative period, day one through day five, was good; but with the creation of man, the sixth day was very good.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, thank You for creating us in Your image. Help us to use wisely the capabilities You have given to us. Help us to be good stewards of Your world. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

**July 7**

## **COMPLETING EACH OTHER**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 2:18-24

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

The last creative work was the creation of man (male and female). In Genesis 1:27, it appears that male and female were created simultaneously. Genesis 2:21-22 teaches that the man was created first, and woman was taken from man. A correct understanding of the passage is vital as it will correct many misconceptions.

God intended for man and woman to share life in physical, emotional, social and spiritual ways. "It is not good for man to be alone." Woman was created from man. She is his counterpart. Man has his completion in the woman just as woman has her completion in the man.

The woman was taken from out of the side of man. This statement is relevant to husbands and wives. The woman is not above the man, neither is she beneath him. She stands at his side as his equal. There is no inferiority to be drawn from the fact that man was first in creation or that woman came from man. God created them to work together in His universe.

God is to be praised for the mutually satisfying relationship of husband and wife. There is no other relationship like it.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, You are to be praised as the creator and sustainer of the universe. Thank You, Father, for the culmination of Your creation in the institution of marriage and the home. In Jesus' name, amen.

## FAITHFUL TO THE COVENANT

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 17:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "He Leadeth Me"

On two previous occasions God entered into this covenant with Abram (Genesis 12 and 15). This third time, however, God brought the agreement or contract into focus and succinctly specified the terms. God would: 1) make Abram the father of a great nation; 2) make nations and kings of his descendants; 3) continue this agreement for generations to come; and 4) give Abram's descendants the land of Canaan. Abram's responsibility was to have faith and obey God. To reflect Abram's new status, his name was changed to Abraham.

When earthly contracts are made, each party expects to give and receive something of similar value. Occasionally we enter into contracts that favor one party or benefit an uninvolved third person. Even in the most beneficent partnerships, however, the recipient never acquires the wealth of blessings that come from a partnership with God.

Abraham was asked to have faith and obey God, and he received blessings. When we enter into a covenant relationship with God, we become members of His family, and we, too, are asked to have faith and obey.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You that we can live in a covenant relationship with You. Thank You that we are heirs according to the promise. Help us, Father, to be faithful. In Jesus' name, amen.

July 9

## OVERCOMING OUR INADEQUACIES

**SCRIPTURE:** Exodus 4:10-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so Christ’s power may rest on me (2 Corinthians 12:9, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Have Thine Own Way”

John was a young man who had a severe stuttering problem. His one desire was to become a minister of the gospel. “You will never be able to be a minister,” his father told him. “Your stuttering problem is too great.” John would not give up. He prayed, sought professional help and learned compensatory techniques. Always positive in his attitude, he also began studying for the ministry. The churches he served during the early days of his ministry were compassionate and helpful. When I met him many years later, he was a successful minister and an articulate speaker. He continued to struggle inwardly with the problem, but it was not apparent to his audience.

How many times have you felt inadequate for a task you must perform or a commitment you have made? Moses was “slow of speech and tongue,” and he felt inadequate for the task even though God promised to be with him.

As Christians when we face difficult challenges, we can focus on our weaknesses and say, in the words of Jill Briscoe’s book, “*Here Am I—Send Aaron!*,” or we can do as the young man, John, and strive to overcome our inadequacies and trust God to help us accomplish our goal.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** You are aware, Father, of our inadequacies, weaknesses and fears. Too often we feel as Moses did and desire that someone more qualified do Your work. Help us to put our trust in You and overcome our weaknesses. In Jesus’ name, amen.



## A SAFE HAVEN

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 8:1-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety (Psalms 4:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "The Haven of Rest"

In the summer of 1993, states along the Mississippi River experienced a great flood. In our community, just as many businesses reopened and people moved back into their homes, there came another torrential rain and the dam could not hold back the water. It was heartwrenching to witness people losing their possessions a second time.

When school opened that fall, we on the professional staff listened as students talked about living in motels, with relatives or in temporary housing, and the loss of their treasures. Tears came quickly and hugs were frequent. The children desperately needed to feel they were in a safe, stable environment. This catastrophe accentuated the transitory nature of worldly goods and the importance of faith, prayer, love, friendship, compassion and caring. It made us acutely aware of our dependence on God's mercies.

God led the children of Israel through the wilderness, provided for them and led them to the promised land. As they were poised on the brink of this new land, He reviewed for them His loving kindness of the past forty years and instructed them not to forget Him. As Christians, we, too, need this review and instruction to keep us in a safe, stable environment.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your loving kindness toward us. Thank You for Your love and compassion and for the support of our Christian family. Through our love and obedience, may we remain safe and secure in Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

July 11

## PRAISE THE LORD

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 106:1-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever (Psalm 106:1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Praise Him! Praise Him!"

The theme of praise pervades the Bible. Psalm 106:1 resounds with the exhortation to Israel to praise God. Praise then takes the form of remembrance and thanksgiving for God's mercy, His power and the Lord's faithful people. The psalmist continues by interceding for God's chosen people.

Praise is more than joyful singing or clapping our hands. In many church bulletins, we see "Praise Time" listed. Praise cannot be relegated to a worship activity. It is a characteristic of the Christian's life. The Hebrew writer speaks of offering a "sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 23:15). Paul speaks of Christians as being "for the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:1), and "filled with the fruit of righteousness . . . to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:11). Peter says faith results in praise (I Peter 1:7). Praise permeates the Christian's life.

Psalms 106 provides a model for praise. Intercession and confession are outgrowths of praise. It is impossible to praise God without realizing our shortcomings, confessing them and seeking forgiveness. As we experience that forgiveness, praise and thanksgiving come forth. It is like the perfect circle. There is no beginning and no ending, just that continual assurance of being in harmony with our Creator.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your mighty acts, Your power and Your love. Help us to confess our wrongs and seek forgiveness. May praise permeate us as we strive to serve You. All glory, honor and praise be Yours. In Jesus' name, amen.

## GOD'S SUSTAINING POWER

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 26:7-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "God Will Take Care of You"

Ann recently observed her seventy-ninth birthday quietly as she recovered from her fifteenth surgery. Early in Ann's marriage when she was pregnant with her daughter, her husband became disabled. Ann worked long hours to support her family, cared for her husband and raised their child. After more than thirty years of marriage, Ann was widowed. She has been in failing health for many years.

Many would say that Ann has had a hard life. Yet, she often says, "I have had a good life" and "God has been so good to me." Says Ann, "I don't view adversity as many people do. I don't think the Lord takes away hardships. I think He gives you courage and strength to endure them." Although Ann struggles with pain daily, she is in church every Sunday. Following the church service, you can hear her laugh ring out as she visits with Christian friends. As you observe Ann, you recognize that her life is characterized by an intimate relationship with the Master. God's blessings fall on both the righteous and the unrighteous, but his sustaining power is for the righteous.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, thank You for Your sustaining power. We know that whatever our circumstances, You are there to support and sustain us. Thank You for individuals like Ann who have trusted in Your strength for so many years and have been victorious through Your power. In Jesus' name, amen.

**July 13**

## **DISCIPLINE IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF LOVE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 32:17-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in (Proverbs 3:12, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Higher Ground"

Discipline has many connotations including punishment and self-control. When our young grandson, Steven, has a temper tantrum, he is sent to his room. His parents hope this will develop self-control. He dislikes this punishment and is happier when he behaves and receives positive reinforcement. However, periodically disobedience sends him back to his room.

The nation of Israel was much like this two-year-old. As Jeremiah emphasized in his prayer, God gave them many blessings, including the land of Canaan, but they did not obey and were being punished. Even as Jeremiah prayed, they were being overtaken by the Babylonians. Yet, the loving Father instructed Jeremiah to buy a plot of land and legally seal the purchase. Disobedient as they had been, God would return the land to them after their captivity.

Are Christians today like Steven and the nation of Israel? God gives us numerous blessings, but do we obey Him? Do we have a spiritual tantrum when something does not go our way? Fortunately, God loves us just as he did the nation of Israel, and we can obtain forgiveness. Nevertheless, it is necessary that we be disciplined as well as forgiven.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, as the Israelites were, so we, too, are often stiff-necked and rebellious. Help us to accept Your discipline. Forgive us for our many shortcomings and thoughtless actions. Guide us into more unselfish paths. In Jesus' name, amen.

## THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:67-79

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us (Luke 1:78, *The New King James Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "The Light of the World is Jesus"

At the circumcision of John the Baptist, after months of silence, Zechariah broke forth into a song of praise. And why wouldn't he? The Old Testament prophecies regarding the long awaited Messiah were about to be fulfilled, and his son would play a vital role.

In Zechariah's song, he spoke of the coming Messiah as the rising sun or Dayspring from on high. Jesus came to be the "Light of the World." Light is such a beautiful word. It dispels darkness, makes vision possible, reminds one of radiance, illumination and brightness. Christ shines forth in this way in the life of the Christian. A consecrated life is beautiful.

It is interesting to speculate how our world would be changed if every Christian let Christ's light shine forth to dispel the darkness of sin that pervades our society today. It is very possible that the need for marches, legislation and social organizations would dissipate and be replaced by a caring, compassionate community.

Zechariah sang a song of praise because he knew that of all God's provisions for humankind, this Dayspring from on high was the greatest gift of all. May we let Him guide our feet into the paths of righteousness.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, You have provided us with gifts beyond measure including the greatest gift of all, Jesus. He is a gift that is indescribable. Make us messengers of Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.

July 15

## HE HEARD MY CRY

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalms 18:6-19

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears (Psalm 18:6, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Just When I Need Him Most"

On November 21, 1992, Hollywood filmmaker Michael Benson, his cameraman, and a helicopter pilot were flying over Kilauea, the world's most active volcano, in Hawaii. Benson and his two-man crew were shooting background film for a new movie. Suddenly, the helicopter lost power and plunged three hundred feet into the crater. The men crawled out of the wreckage and waited in dense volcanic fog for rescue. On the first day of the wreck, the pilot was picked up. On the second day, the cameraman made the treacherous three hundred foot climb to the top, leaving Benson behind.

As the third day neared, Benson prayed to God for a clear day so rescuers could find him. In answer to his prayer, a helicopter appeared and lowered a net to carry Benson out of the inferno. Without hesitation he leaped into the net to safety.

Ever since Adam and Eve's sin, mankind has teetered on the edge of a spiritual abyss, in danger of falling into an eternal inferno. God, however, has heard our cries and placed His Son between us and destruction. Are we willing, without hesitation, to leap into His open arms so He can carry us to safety?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our heavenly Father, Thank You for sending us Jesus to save us from the consequences of our sins. Help us to trust in Him always for our eternal salvation. In Jesus' name, amen.

## GOD IS MY FORTRESS

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Samuel 22:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

The year 1527 was a terrible period for Martin Luther, the German theologian who began the Protestant Reformation. In January, he suffered a heart attack and nearly died. Six months later, Luther was felled by a stroke and was so sure of his imminent death that he said goodbye to his wife, Kate, and year-old son, Hans.

In August, the plague broke out in town and Luther’s beloved University of Wittenberg had to be moved to Jena, leaving him behind. That same month, Martin’s close friend, Leonard Kaiser, was burned at the stake in Scherding for preaching protestantism.

The plague raged on into autumn, nearly claiming little Hans as a victim. Luther blamed himself for his woes, and his depression almost overwhelmed him. But through it all he clung desperately to his faith in God. By December, the plague had abated, Hans was well, and Kate had added a baby girl to the family.

Overcome with joy, Luther penned a hymn based on Psalm 46:1: “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing. . . .”

Like Martin Luther, may we let God be our fortress in times of distress, for He never fails!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** We thank You, Father, for watching over us in times of distress, for strengthening us to endure Satan’s attacks, and for giving us Your Son, Jesus, to bear our burdens. Because of Him, we can persevere to the end. Amen.

July 17

## GUARD YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS

**SCRIPTURE:** Daniel 3:24-30

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Little children, guard yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21 *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Dare to be a Daniel”

In the year, 155, the venerable Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, was arrested and charged with treason for teaching Christians not to worship pagan gods and for refusing to worship the Roman Emperor as a god. Led into a packed stadium in Smyrna, Polycarp was ordered to renounce Christ or die. His reply echoes down through the centuries: “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

Every generation has had to wrestle with the sin of idol worship: substituting something else for God. The ancient Israelites had their golden calf. The Babylonian captives were required to worship the Babylonian deities. The early Christians had to resist the call to worship the emperor. The pressure to conform and give in was intense, but faithful believers like Joshua, Daniel, and Polycarp resisted—sometimes at the cost of their lives.

Why is idol worship condemned in Scripture? Because no idol can save us from our sins. Then why is it so popular? Because no idol will *condemn* us for our sins.

Let us choose whom we will serve: an idol that allows us to sin, or the Lord, who saves us from our sin.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, keep us from the sin of idolatry by helping us to focus our minds on the pure teaching of Your Word. May we be faithful to proclaim that Word to others, so they can escape idolatry, too. In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.



## GOD'S FUGITIVE

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 12:6-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "How Firm a Foundation"

According to early church tradition, the Apostles Peter and Paul were both martyred by the Roman Emperor Nero. The story goes that the two apostles saw Nero's favorite magician, Simon Magus, performing feats of magic, including self-levitation. When Peter and Paul prayed for God's intervention, Magus crashed to the ground, breaking both legs. Infuriated, Nero first had the apostles cast into prison for nine months, then had them executed: Paul by beheading, and Peter by crucifixion.

This was a far different result from Peter's imprisonment in Acts 12 and Paul's in Acts 16. In each case, God released the apostle from prison to continue his ministry. Why did God rescue these two apostles from prison then, only to allow them to be martyred later?

In Philippians 1, Paul gives us a dual answer to this question. First, God spared them because they had years of fruitful labor still ahead of them (1:22). Second, God allowed their sacrifice later, knowing that in death they would exalt Christ before the unbelieving Romans (1:20). Paul knew that whether he lived or died, his primary reason for existence was always to glorify Christ and His Kingdom.

Is that our purpose today, as well?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You for the sacrificial love of the earliest Christians. May we be as committed to the faith and as courageous in the face of persecution as they were. In Jesus' name, amen.

July 19

## ADRIFT AT SEA

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 27:39-44

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming . . . (Ephesians 4:14, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Throw Out the Lifeline

In October, 1982, the five-man crew of the 58-foot ketch, *Trashman*, was sailing from Maine to Florida to deliver the boat to its owner. Off Cape Hatteras, the crew encountered 70-knot winds and 30-foot waves that quickly sent the boat to the bottom of the Atlantic. The sailors scrambled into a dinghy and rode out the storm, praying the Coast Guard would soon rescue them.

For days the crew was adrift at sea, without food or water. Insane with thirst, the captain and another crewman went overboard and were killed by sharks. A third crewman died of infection and dehydration. When rescue finally came, only two, Deborah Scaling and Brad Cavanagh, survived, because they kept their heads while battling the sharks, the sun, and the raging sea.

The Apostle Paul warns every Christian to beware the dangers of false doctrine and false teachers. Like the wind and the sea, they can toss us to and fro until we don't know what to believe. Then we become easy prey for Satan's denizens.

What are we to do? Salvation comes by filling our minds with the truth of Christ, the Word of God. That way, we can keep our heads clear and our hearts pure.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You for the saving truth taught by Your Son. If we heed His Words, we know they will save us from Satan's squalls. In Jesus' name, amen.

## DELIVER US FROM EVIL

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Yield Not to Temptation"

If you believe in some forms of modern psychology, man is incapable of resisting certain temptations. In a famous university experiment, students were brought into a room, two at a time, to take a written test needed to pass a course. While the professor left the room, a third student was told to enter the room and volunteer test answers to the other two. When the professor returned, he specifically asked the first two students if anyone had given them any answers to the test. In every case, each student answered, "no."

Are humans so prone to lying that none of us can resist, under the right conditions? On the one hand, the Bible seems to agree with the psychologists. "There is no one who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3). "There is nothing reliable in what they say . . . their throat is an open grave" (Psalm 5:9). On the other hand, the Bible also says we can resist any particular temptation if we follow God's escape route.

The truth is, we all sin on occasion. For the Christian, however, sin is not "business as usual." It is the horrible, agonizing exception to an otherwise holy lifestyle. Let us strive to make virtue, not vice, the rule in our daily lives.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, help us to resist temptation, as we know we can through Your power, so that we might glorify Your name before the unbelieving world. Because of Jesus, amen.

July 21

## SAFELY HOME

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Timothy 4:9-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

We were on our way home from escorting our congregation's Bible Bowl team to the North American Christian Convention in Orlando, Florida. The trip had been inspirational, educational, and more than a little bit enjoyable. But it also had its share of hazards and problems. On the way down through Georgia, we encountered blinding rain storms caused by Hurricane Alberto's sweeping north from the Gulf of Mexico. After the convention, flooding in the Florida panhandle and in southern Georgia forced us to go far to the east, through South and North Carolina, before turning west to head home to Missouri.

As we neared our residence in Moberly, exhausted from our 3,000 mile excursion, my son expressed everyone's thoughts when he said, "I had a great vacation, but I'm sure glad to be safely home!"

The Apostle Paul reminds us in several of his letters that whether our lives are filled with joy or sorrow, triumph or tribulation, the goal of every Christian is to be home with the Lord. Moreover, as Paul reminded Timothy, the Lord has both the will and the power to make that goal a reality. When that day comes, we will know we are finally home.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** We thank You, heavenly Father, for promising us a place in Your eternal kingdom. We anxiously await the day when we can go home with You forever. In His name, amen.

July 22

## WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 115:3-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him? Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:6, 7, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O God Our Help In Ages Past"

Well, I'll tell you who we are. In the very beginning God created the heavens and the earth. On the sixth day of creation God created man. In fact, He fashioned man in His own image, after His own likeness. It is no small thing to be made in the image of the Almighty God. God thought so much of us that He made us, His favorite of all creation, to be like Him. Who are we? We are a people very much like God.

Yes, Sir, I'll tell you who we are. God loved you and me so much that when sin threatened to keep us forever apart from God, He sent His only Son, Jesus, to rescue us. He cares for us. He was willing to die for us.

I'll tell you still more about who we are. When Christ Jesus left this earth to go prepare heaven, He left the Holy Spirit as His holy presence among us. So no matter what the problem we encounter day after day, and no matter where the crisis leads us, we have a very present help in time of trouble. Indeed, we are the daily object of God's tender loving care.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, to know Your mind is beyond us. You have loved us so much to create us in Your likeness, and we are grateful. Thank You for considering our dilemma of sin and for providing for our eternity through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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July 22-28. **Dan Lawson** is Director of Development at Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City, Tennessee. He and his wife, Linda, have two children.

**July 23**

## **I'M SOMETIMES UP, I'M SOMETIMES DOWN**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 12:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows (Luke 12:7, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen"

Yesterday was a bad day. Murphy's Law seemed to be in effect everywhere. In other words, it seemed everything that could go wrong, went wrong. It was just one of those days.

Does that sound familiar? Some days can only be described as a "Monday." Other days are colored black by a major crisis. Another day was a day when people disappointed you. Still another day would have been better if it simply had not begun.

Where in the world is the God of heaven and earth, the Lord of life and the Savior of mankind? Is God aware of our suffering? Does He even know that we are experiencing trouble down here? With all that seems to be going wrong, a moment to pray seems far away. So is God aware of the gravity of life's circumstances?

The gospel writer, Luke, would answer an emphatic, "Yes." He writes that even the hairs of our head are all numbered. That's something that most human beings do not even know. If God knows that bit of trivia, surely He is aware of those concerns of greater consequences.

It only follows, then, that if He is aware, He must also be in a position to help. Praise the Lord!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, yesterday was a day I'd like not to repeat, and yet I would live it again simply to see the miracle of You at work in my life. You promised that all things would work together for good, if I love You and trust You. I look forward to the good in this new day. You are my God, and I am Your person. In Jesus' name, amen.

## ARE YOU THERE, JESUS?

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Peter 5:6-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:26, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “O Yes He Cares, I Know He Cares”

A counselor once lectured that friendship describes a person who is there when you need him. A friend is one who is there when you need someone to talk with, or when you need someone to listen. A friend is one who in the midst of crisis does not say a word but is simply there as a shoulder to lean on often in stark silence.

A priest once gave a struggling young atheist this simple advice. Go into the church and look straight at the cross and say three times, “Christ died for me and I don’t care.”

The young man boldly walked into the empty sanctuary of the church building. He walked up to the altar and stood before the cross of Christ. He shouted at the cross, “Jesus Christ died for me and I don’t give a care!” Again a second time he said, but with less fervor, “Jesus Christ died for me and I don’t give a care.” The third time he began, “Jesus Christ died for me and I don’t give. . . .” But he could not finish the denial.

In stark silence from the event of the cross, the young man realized that Christ Jesus went to the cross because He cared. And He still does!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, thank You for caring about me. I know that I am not worthy, and yet You gave Your Son that I might have life eternal. Thank You for being there when I need a friend. In the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

**July 25**

## **THE SAMSON IN US ALL**

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 41:8-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

My friend's wife left him and wants a divorce. She left him for another person, and he has been destroyed by the whole episode. He was so used to having her at his side, and now he is all alone. Look at him in worship. He sits by himself without a friend in the world. Why does he put himself up for this kind of abuse. It's just not fair.

I wish I could help him. But just as soon as I reach out to him, then a business trip will take me out of town and out of his touch for the next two weeks. Can't somebody help him?

I can't believe we sang those hymns in church today with my friend sitting there. "When I am sad, He makes me glad . . ." or "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear," or "Because He lives I can face tomorrow. . . ." That has to be tearing him up! But wait a minute. Didn't the preacher say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

And there is the answer for us all. In times of crisis, in times of joy, in times of grief, or in times of celebration, the Lord is our strength. We must indeed be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, without You we could be nothing! Without You we'd be afraid to live through the day. Thank You, dear Lord, for bringing out the Samson in us all. You are our strength. In our weakness Your might is obvious. May others this day see Christ living mightily in us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



## THROUGH IT ALL

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 46:3-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

I saw it coming, but I never thought it would happen. I've worked the same job for twenty-two years, and thought I was doing a good job. Today the boss called me into his office. He suggested that I look elsewhere for employment. I guess I've been fired. What will I ever do? How will I pay the bills? How will I provide for my family? How could God let this happen to me? I've been faithful to God. Is He angry with me?

It seems like when it rains, it pours! A week after I lost my job, I received a phone call telling me that my mother-in-law had died. Why is all of this happening to me? As if that pressure weren't enough, it's even starting to effect my marriage and my family life. I can't cope. I think I might go crazy.

Sometimes the crises of life knock us off our feet. Have you ever been in the midst of a life crisis that destabilized you so much that you could not even pray to God?

Don't worry, God is faithful. Even in our times of weakness God perseveres. In the midst of our depression, God's Spirit interprets our sighs and groans too deep for words to the Father. He knows and He cares.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, today I pray for those who are unable to pray, for those whose circumstances have pushed them behind a cloud of doubt and separation. Be ever near them. Restore to them the joy of their salvation and uphold them with a willing spirit. You have been faithful to us. May we this day celebrate your kindness by a faithfulness of our own. In Jesus' name, amen.

**July 27**

## **20/20 VISION**

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 4:1-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For the Lord sees not as man sees, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart (I Samuel 16:7, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Be Thou My Vision"

God sees all! He is not an old man whose sight is failing. He is not blind. He sees that which man does not see. God has 20/20 vision. He has hindsight and foresight. He can even see into the heart and mind of a person.

What does this all-seeing God see? He sees our actions, even those done in secret, good and bad. He sees our motives often hidden from those who would judge us. He sees the consequence, that which comes after our actions, yet in the future, that which we are unable to see.

Where can this all-seeing God see? He sees beyond the limitation of distance. When we reside in Tennessee, He still can see in Oregon. He can see us worshipping in a church building; or He can see us at our work. His vision extends beyond the circumference of the earth to the far reaches of the universe.

We cannot hide from God because His eye is fixed on us. God cannot loose us, for we are never out of His protective sight. How fortunate we are to be within the sight of such an all powerful creator and God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You that in the darkness of this sinful world, You stand as the Light of the world. You have enlightened our thoughts to enable us to have the mind of God. You have lightened our pathway enabling us to find our way from earth to heaven. May we this day be able to see Thee more clearly. In Jesus' name, amen.

## LOOK TO GOD ON HIGH

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 8:26-35

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (1 Peter 1:21, *Revised Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "You are My Hiding Place"

We should trust that which merits our trust. If the highway department has earned our trust, then we should drive across the bridges they build. If the bank has merited our trust, then we should place our life's fortune in that bank. If a doctor has proven he can be trusted, then we should place our health in his wise counsel.

God merits our trust. We can be confident in the God of creation. If that same God can provide for all of His creation, surely we can trust Him to provide for us, His favorite creature.

The Bible is full of God's promises to us. In the New Testament, God has promised us that if we trust Him and fit into His purpose, He will work everything together for our good. God promised it, so we must trust Him to keep His Word. Paul wrote, "If God is for us, who is against us?" Jesus even said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." We can have confidence in Almighty God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, I place this day and my life in Your hands. You are my confidence; I trust You fully. This is a day that I will celebrate in advance, for I know full well that every good and perfect gift I receive this day will come from You. Today, I place my life in Your hands. Thank You for Your Son and my Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name, I pray. Amen.

July 29

## DO NOT FRET

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 37:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes (Psalm 37:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Be Still and Know”

It doesn't seem to be fair. Drug dealers put their money in banks all over the world. They drive big cars and do little visible work. World leaders, elected to look after the good of their people, stay in office by intrigue and murder. Good things appear to happen to bad people. We complain but nothing seems to change. Why do evil men succeed?

We live in an “instant gratification” age. Fast food restaurants, FAX machines, express check-out counters, and Instant Replay all feed our desire for immediate satisfaction. Advertisers promise to make us instant millionaires. The lottery has instant winners. We even drink instant coffee and eat microwave meals that can be “prepared” in minutes. In our culture, life is to be lived in the moment and for the moment.

Peter reminds us, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:15, *New International Version*). The psalmist says, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. . . .” Don't fret. Wait on the Lord.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, be patient with us while we learn to be patient with You. Help us not to fret about evil men, but pray that they may find salvation in Jesus, through Whom we pray. Amen.

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July 29-August 4. **Dr. David Grubbs** is President of Cincinnati Christian College and Seminary. He and his wife, Eva, served for many years as medical missionaries in Zimbabwe.

## THE BEST CHOICE

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 118:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes (Psalm 118:9, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Trusting Jesus"

Once, long ago, I wanted to be ill with chicken pox. One by one, my second grade classmates missed school for several days because of chicken pox. Because the weather was beautiful, I wanted to be away from school. I wanted chicken pox so badly that I visited my sick classmates on my way home from school, hoping to catch the illness. But, alas, I never had a single pock that anyone could see.

Years later, when I was a student in medical college, I saw the body of a 7 year old boy who had died of complications from chicken pox. It is a very unusual thing to happen, and we medical students were impressed that a disease so common could have such a terrible result. He was the same age that I was when I so badly wanted the disease. Sometimes our choices, based on temporary and selfish goals, are not good choices.

Gods love endures forever. The psalmist, in our Scripture for today, reminds us to choose to trust God, not men. Things which are designed to last forever should not be put into the hands of a temporary man, even if that man is a prince. God is not only the best choice, he is the only choice. Put your trust in the living and all powerful God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, You are good. Your love endures forever. Please forgive us for seeking temporary answers for eternal necessities. You have delivered us in the past. Accept our worship today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

July 31

## SIDEWALKS MADE FROM CASTLES

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 26:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust (Isaiah 26:5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Need Thee Every Hour"

On our Bible college and seminary campus we have a parking lot upon which commuting students park when they drive in for classes. Each school day cars of many kinds and of many colors are parked for the day while their very diverse drivers attend classes. That parking lot is located at a place that used to be a very deep valley. It was filled up with the rubble from the clearing of an old part of the city of Cincinnati.

At one time, those destroyed buildings were among the best in the city. Shops, offices, businesses, and even homes were destroyed in the renovation. Long ago, the owners and builders considered them the best and most lasting in the city. Now all fills a big hole and on the top sits students cars, dripping oil and antifreeze on the creative glory of men.

Kings may build their castles thinking they have put themselves above and beyond the poor and the oppressed. The day comes when those castles are destroyed and the rubble smooths the journey of the poor. God, in His good time, brings justice and righteousness. No person is so lofty that he cannot be humbled before God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, sometimes I have a problem with humility. My pride goes before me, and I often stumble over it. Forgive me, and provide the strength for me to forgive others. Help me to see that only You are worthy of praise. You are everlasting. In the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

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# DEVOTIONS

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## August

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photo by H. Armstrong Roberts

**August 1**

## **THE GREAT STONE FACE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 50:4-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know I will not be put to shame (Isaiah 50:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “How Firm a Foundation”

On the banks of the Zambezi River in Africa, at the edge of the Victoria Falls, stands the statue of David Livingstone. He was the first visitor from the world outside of Africa to see the falls. He rested his canoe on an island in the middle of the falls and named them for his queen, Victoria of England.

Opposed by people in England, he was, nevertheless, determined to stop the trading in slaves and to open Africa to the preaching of the Gospel.

I have visited that statue several times. The expression on the face and the look in the eyes is always one of determination. That great stone face of David Livingstone reflects a determination that greatly contributed to making Africa “free indeed.”

Mark speaks of the determination of Jesus to go to Jerusalem and to the cross. “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be betrayed . . .”(Mark 10:32). Our Scripture for today says, “He set His face like a flint.” Jesus never wavered in His determination to save us. He wants us to have that same kind of “fixed-in-stone” determination to serve Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, I waver because my trust in You is weak. Thank You for Jesus, and for faithful and determined people who made my salvation possible. Strengthen me today as I face a hostile world. In Jesus’ name, amen.



## FEAR OF MAN

**SCRIPTURE:** Proverbs 29:22-27

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts the Lord is kept safe (Proverbs 29:25, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Only Trust Him”

Following World War II, the famous Nuremberg War Trials were held to establish the guilt of those who had used the opportunity of war to commit crimes. German army officers were asked why they had done such terrible things to helpless people. Quite often the reply was, “I was following orders. “

Why would such orders be followed? Does patriotism or military conduct require a person to ignore ethical and moral values that are regarded by the community? Why follow the orders? A major reason is the fear of men. Those who followed the orders, and were condemned as guilty of crimes, were often more afraid of their military leaders than they were of the community. One does not escape the guilt for doing wrong because of entrapment by fear.

Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple of Jesus “because he feared the Jews.” Our verse for today warns against our being influenced by a fear of man. Peer pressure or even outright fear of what people may do to us greatly influence the practice of our faith. “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.” Don’t fall into the devil’s trap. Trust in God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, thank You for Your Bible which teaches “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Help me to be wise, not falling into Satan’s snare. Guide me this day, O God, to live in Your ways. In the name of Jesus Christ my Savior, I pray. Amen.

August 3

## THE SAFEST PLACE

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 31:11-24

**SCRIPTURE FOR TODAY:** In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues (Psalm 31:20, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "He Hideth My Soul"

An ancient desert story tells of an encounter with death. A caravan leader was in Damascus with his servant. This servant had just returned from the market and was shaking with fear.

When the master asked what had happened, the servant replied, "Today, in the market, I saw death. Death was walking about looking into the faces of people as though he was looking for his next victim. I am leaving immediately for Nineveh because I am afraid he was looking for me."

After seeing his servant off to Nineveh, the master went to the market. Finding Death there he asked, "What are you doing here? Are you looking for my servant?"

Death replied, "Oh, no. Today, I am looking for other people. I have an appointment in Nineveh with your servant the day after tomorrow."

Is there any safe place on earth? Yes. The safest place on earth is to be where God wants you to be, doing the things that He wants you to be doing. Shelter and safety are found only in Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, thank You for freedom from fear. How great is Your goodness. God, I can confidently go about the duties of the day. I trust in You, O Lord; I say, "You are my God" (Psalm 31:19). I praise You for Your wonderful love to me. Help me to be strong and to put all my hope in You. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

## MY HIDING PLACE

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 32:6-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance (Psalm 32:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "You Are My hiding Place"

Do you have a favorite place to hide? Most of us have hiding places that we use to escape the pressures of the day. Doctors learn all the back stairways and exit doors in the hospital. They know that most people ride the elevators, so, when tired and under stress, they slip out of the hospital by going down the back stairway. Surely you have your own place to hide. It may be the mall, a library, a city park, or even some place in your own home.

Every Sunday, during the morning worship service, a number of people will be present because they feel a need to hide. They may not sing, share in the communion service, or fill out an attendance record. They are not likely to volunteer to help in any way. They may not stay long enough to greet anyone as they leave. They have come in to hide. That may be acceptable. Everyone needs some time to hide, as long as they do not hide forever.

"You are my hiding place, you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" (Psalm 32:7). It is good to know that we have the ultimate hiding place: God. When life is threatening, He surrounds us with deliverance.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, at times I feel that I can no longer cope with the burden of life. I'm afraid of failure. Hide me in the shelter of your arms. Today, O Lord, I rejoice in Your righteousness. I will sing and lift my heart to You. In the name of Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

August 5

## HIS MARK ON ME

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 26:15-19

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** This is how we know who the children of God are and Who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother (1 John 3:10, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”

I have the “Smith nose.” Prominent, to be sure, slightly bulbous, with a crease creating terminal hemispheres, my nose marks me as my father’s son, my grandfather’s grandson, and my great-grandfather’s great-grandson. I have my father’s walk, as well. I did not consciously cultivate this idiosyncrasy and was indeed unaware of it until a college friend insisted, “You walk like your dad!”

God chose the children of Israel to be His children. He commanded *them* to “walk in His ways.” By cultivating a distinctive character, the Israelites would honor God and set His goodness in contrast to the wickedness of the other peoples in and around Canaan. By receiving God’s blessing, which He conditioned upon obedience to His commands, the children of Israel displayed God’s goodness, power, and superiority to the so-called gods of the other peoples.

Jesus, too, has marked His children. Just as the “Smith nose” sets apart the true Smiths (my clan) from the others who just happen to have my name, so the mark of the Christian makes it easy to discern those who are His.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** I praise You, O Lord, for Your holy righteousness. You have told and shown me how to live and how to love. Amen.

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August 5-11. **Robin Smith** is an attorney who lives in Baltimore, Maryland, with his wife Lois, and their twin daughters, Kelsey and Katie.



## GETTING READY

**SCRIPTURE:** Joshua 1:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet filled with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:14, 15, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “How Firm a Foundation”

As an attorney, I spend weeks and months preparing for trials that last just a few short days. Documents are reviewed, witnesses instructed, depositions conducted, transcripts summarized and digested, charts and graphs created, and motions, questions, and speeches drafted. There is no substitute for painstaking preparation; it is the key to success.

In every area of life, the importance of preparation varies directly with the difficulty and size of the task. Simple jobs, short jobs, can be done well without much preparation, but big jobs, complex jobs, usually cannot. I can do small things for God without much preparation. Success in the more difficult things, however, hinges on persistent attention to daily Bible study and prayer. God warned Joshua that he needed to meditate “day and night” if he hoped to inhabit the promised land.

At the end of the twentieth century, life often becomes hectic, and finding time for Bible reading and prayer can be problematic. Personal devotions are *the* foundation for godly living, however, which is no small task, I find.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** I praise and thank You, O God, for the guidance and support I gain from Your Word. Every day I find guidance for the tasks at hand. Lead me today, Father, to work for You. Give me eyes to see what You may have in store for me. Amen.

August 7

## TOO LATE TO SAY “SORRY”

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Samuel 1:22-29

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory (Habakkuk 2:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Search Me, O God”

Early in his career as a professional baseball player, Pete Rose earned the nickname “Charlie Hustle” for his enthusiastic play. By running hard on routine hits to the outfield, he stretched singles into doubles, finishing with a headlong dive into the bag. He even ran to first base after being walked! Motivated by a patent love for the game, he mastered a variety of infield and outfield positions while becoming baseball's most prolific hitter. During his career, teammates and opponents alike lionized him as the player to be emulated.

To the extent that people still think of Pete Rose, they seldom remember him as “Charlie Hustle.” He is no longer a baseball hero. At the end of his career, he violated a rule against betting. Though he denied that he had done wrong, Pete Rose eventually agreed to banishment from professional baseball. Thus he was deprived of that which he had long sought: induction into The Baseball Hall of Fame.

Saul, too, finished badly after a promising start. Hailed as being “swifter than eagles and stronger than lions,” he stood head and shoulders above the other Israelites. But the young hero found obedience burdensome.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, I would stoke the fire of my zeal for You. Let me not be like the Christians in Sardis who appeared to be alive but in reality were dead. Satan lies in wait for me. Guide my feet that I may obey Your commands. I pray, today in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## TERROR AND COMFORT—INTERTWINED

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 6:11-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events (Acts 5:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Onward, Christian Soldiers”

Of nineteenth-century author George MacDonald, C.S. Lewis said, “I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more continually close, to the Spirit of Christ Himself. Hence his Christlike union of tenderness and severity. Nowhere else outside the New Testament have I found terror and comfort so intertwined.” Thus, in his short story, “*The Princess and Curdie*,” MacDonald depicts his young, naive protagonist splitting the skull of a dog that attacked him and Lina, the strange beast that served him. Curdie “heaved his mattock over his shoulder” and when a “great ugly bull-dog flew at him . . . Curdie struck him through the brain, and the brute fell dead at his feet.” Before he could recover, a huge mastiff flew at him. Seeing her master in danger, Lina “seemed to go mad with rage. As the mastiff jumped at Curdie’s throat, Lina flew at his, seized him with her tremendous jaws, gave one roaring grind, and he lay beside the bull-dog with his neck broken.”

There comes a day of reckoning, when terror and comfort are intertwined. Noah and his family survived the flood, but God put an end to everyone else. When the earth is filled with violence, only the people of the covenant can survive. When Jesus returns, terror and comfort will again be intertwined.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Help me, dear Father, to know You, to honor and revere You, and to fear You. Help me to unite tenderness and severity in my life, as Jesus did in His. Amen.

August 9

## TIMES CHANGE

**SCRIPTURE:** Joshua 11:10-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Living for Jesus”

The message seemed anachronistic, posted on the bumper of a Ford Taurus. “CHALLENGE AUTHORITY” it blared, evoking images of bullhorns on college campuses in the late 1960’s. I could not help but wonder to whom the message was addressed. Was there in the 1990’s a man, woman, boy, or girl alive who had not long ago made a habit of challenging authority? Wasn’t that the lesson of My Lai and Watergate—that you can’t trust authority? Blind obedience is the stuff of fools!

If Joshua had carried out his campaign in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, he would have been accused of war crimes. Slaughtering “innocent” women and children would have been considered grounds for his own execution. The gruesome civil wars in Somalia, Rwanda, and the Balkans can be recalled if needed to appreciate the awful details of Joshua’s pogrom. Yet God had commanded it, “and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded.”

Should we be like Joshua? Should we obey God’s commands? All of them? Even those that seem hopelessly out of date? Consider these: “Marriage should be honored by all.” “Do not let any unwholesome talk—obscenity, foolishness, or coarse jesting—come out of your mouth.” “Do not lie.” “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.”

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, please help me to obey Your Word. Help me to apply my intellect without exalting it over Your Word. Amen.



## THE COURAGE TO OBEY

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 18:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** "Come," he said. Then Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus (Matthew 14:29, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Trust and Obey"

It takes courage to step off of a cliff, with only a rope to prevent you from falling to your death. I'll never forget my first rappelling experience at the Grand Canyon. I stood on the edge for the longest time, my legs trembling uncontrollably as I asked the instructor again and again, "Are you sure this rope will hold me?" I also remember well my last rappelling experience. I was with two college-aged friends. Watching them each fall a few feet to the ground as we were starting up the cliff dissipated what little confidence I had had in them. When we paused at the first ledge to plan the next stage of the assault, I decided to let them climb without me.

It takes courage of a different sort to obey God. Hezekiah was a young man when he began a reformation of Judah's religion. His smashing of sacred stones and removal of heathen places of worship were sure to stir opposition. He boldly destroyed the Mosaic serpent that had been a national treasure for hundreds of years. He arranged for a celebration of the Passover, even though it was widely scorned.

The courage to rappel is born of confidence in one's equipment and companions. The courage Hezekiah displayed was born of confidence in God. Because he trusted God, his record is one of remarkable achievement in obedience to God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You for bearing me safely through times of hardship. Uphold me as I live for You. Amen.

## OBEDIENCE HURTS

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 5:1-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "At the Cross"

"Do not touch Daddy's glasses." "Do not bang on your tray." At first blush, these commands appear to have little, if anything, in common. But as Gary Ezzo and Robert Bucknam point out in the book *Babywise II*, they share the underlying goal of teaching submission to parental instruction. Opportunities to teach self-control and patterns of acceptable behavior are established. Having learned obedience in small matters, a child is prepared for future obedience in matters of much greater significance.

Bending one's will to the will of another always generates a great deal of psychic pain. Babies and young children readily vocalize that pain! Adults often internalize the pain, but it is, nonetheless, present. Obedience cannot be learned without suffering of some sort.

Because of our familiarity with the event that gained our salvation, we could easily gloss over the heart-rending pain Jesus experienced as He subordinated His will to the Father's will. Our text simply notes His "loud cries and tears" as He contemplated the cross.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty God, how I wish that You would simply overwhelm my will with Your will. How easy it would be if I did not want to do and think and say things that You do not want me to do and think and say. Please forgive my failings. Comfort me with the assurance of Your forgiveness. Amen.



## WHY WILL YOU DIE?

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 18:25-32

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”

Our plane had just taken off and had nearly reached its cruising altitude when the pilot's voice came over the intercom: “I'm sorry, we have encountered some minor mechanical difficulties, and we must return to the airport for emergency repairs.” The plane turned back and landed at the airport from which we had just left. Obviously the pilot felt it was essential to turn back if we were to avoid a crash and live.

*How like life*, I thought. Why should we die? Why not turn around—repent—and live? When life is on a course toward absolute destruction, it is practical and reasonable to change course toward righteousness and life.

Suppose most of the things we say and do are right with God, but certain other things are not so good. Let me answer in this way. One crack in the metal of an airplane indicates metal fatigue. The crack may be small, but left alone it can cause a crash. A strategic screw left out of an engine can result in total engine failure.

One sin left unrepented of without cleansing by the blood of Christ can result in eternal death. Repent and live!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, please forgive my wayward thoughts and deeds in the past and for today. In Jesus' name, amen.

**August 13**

## **EVIDENCE OF CHANGE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Joel 2:10-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love (Joel 2:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Since Jesus Came Into My Heart"

There is considerable difference between being sorry and real repentance. There is also a difference between being sorry and being sorry for getting caught.

The ancient Jews showed their sorrow or remorse by tearing their clothes. Everyone could then see how sorry they were.

Repentance is something quite different. It means literally, "a change of mind," which, of course, leads to a change of life or behavior. John the Baptist commanded the Jews to show evidence of their repentance (Luke 3:8ff). He further explained and demanded (my paraphrase), "Share your garments with the poor; feed those who have no food." To the tax collectors he said, "Be fair and honest." To the soldiers he said, "Don't accuse people falsely nor extort money from them, and be content with your pay." In other words, live right and sin not in relation to others. God knows when repentance is genuine as opposed to sorrow for show. God looks upon the heart and that is where repentance must occur.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, forgive my sinful thoughts and deeds. Come into my heart and cleanse away my guilt. Give me a new desire to do good in Your sight. Teach me to abound in love and compassion for others. Allow me to be an example, today, of Your love. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

## NO EXCEPTIONS: ANYONE CAN BE LOST

**SCRIPTURE:** LUKE 13:1-5

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish (Luke 13: 3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Almost Persuaded”

Do you find it embarrassing to get a speeding ticket? I do! And I get angry and frustrated and humbled when the policeman gives me the usual questioning with subsequent lecture. He usually admonishes me to speed no more.

One evening when I was traveling through a highway construction area in Columbus, OH., I was signaled over by a patrolman who was sitting beside the road in his cruiser amidst the orange barrels with his red and blue lights blinking.

I knew I had been speeding a little, but I was traveling with the traffic. It was a 45 mph zone and I was probably doing 55 mph. When the officer walked up to my car window, I said, “I was traveling at the same speed as the traffic, why did you pick me out?” He replied, “Your engine was running faster,” and promptly wrote out a citation.

Anyone can get a ticket for violating traffic rules. Some may get by with violations temporarily, but eventually they get caught. In the eyes of God, no one escapes punishment for sin—rich, poor; male, female; black, white; red, yellow—no one! Either you pay the punishment or Christ does it for you. Except you repent you will definitely perish.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, I am so vulnerable to temptation and sin that it seems I am in a trap. Please forgive my sins and sinful ways. Give me the confidence that comes with Your forgiveness. Thank You for allowing me to be Your child. Through Christ, amen.

**August 15**

## **ANYONE CAN BE SAVED**

**SCRIPTURE: Romans 10:5-13**

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Jesus, I Come”

He was deeply into the drug culture. His guitar kept him in good stead with the music world, but that was not enough to save him from his headlong slide toward hell. His home had been a crisis of human dereliction. His parents were usually drunk and passed out on the floor. Only a friend, the son of a preacher, touched his life for good, but this friend also was tangled up in drugs.

One night everything came crashing down. Stoned on drugs, he grasped a light post for support. He slipped into a crumple mass on the ground. He had reached the end. Death loomed near. He began to cry out to God for help. Somehow he gained enough strength to get to the preacher's home and fell face forward on the porch. Hearing a noise, the preacher came to the door, took him in, and helped him back to reality.

To make a long story short, the young man accepted Christ, overcame his drug habit with God's help, and set about to use his guitar and testimony to reach teens and college students who were on the same path from which he had been rescued. He became a powerful witness and counselor on a college campus. Indeed God will save anyone who calls upon Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Oh Lord, hear my cry. Cleanse my soul. Set me on a new path and make me whole. Thank You, O Father, for those who tell the good news of the gospel. Help me today not only to speak Your word, but to live it. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

## GUILTY

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 32:1-5

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered (Psalm 32 :1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Lord, I’m Coming Home”

Richard M. Nixon, 37th President of the United States died today while I was writing this devotion. Thus ended an era in the history of this country.

The Watergate scandal brought shame and remorse to the presidency. Power corrupts. Crimes were committed and hidden from the American people—for a time. Taped conversations were erased from an elaborate recording system. High officials lied to congress and investigators. Finally much of the truth was exposed and various persons of high rank in government were convicted and incarcerated. President Nixon himself was forced to resign.

Throughout the entire affair Mr. Nixon denied wrong doing. The world will never know the full extent of his guilt or innocence. Convicting evidence recorded on tapes was destroyed. Later succeeding president, Gerald Ford, pardoned Nixon, absolving him of all guilt.

Experts have suggested that if Mr. Nixon had early on come clean with the nation and admitted his error or guilt, he likely would have been forgiven. Whether or not this might have happened is unknown, but in the case of our own sins, God will forgive and cleanse us if we confess them to Him and fall upon His mercy.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, may we be willing to come clean and to confess our sins to You. Thank You, God, for your gracious promises to remove our sins as far as the east is from the west. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

**August 17**

## **FOR MY SAKE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 36:22-28

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Whiter Than Snow"

As a teenager I had the same basic temptations as most other teens. To some I easily submitted. Others I strongly resisted. There were the usual lures that most teens must face. Drugs had not yet entered the teen scene. I danced when the church leaders said it was sinful. I ran with some kids who had questionable backgrounds. I relate these things not because I am proud of my escapades but to share how God, like the "Hound of Heaven," never gave up on me.

One of the strongest deterrents in my life was a godly mother who prayed for me constantly. She endured many of my foibles realizing that teens need some leeway to find for themselves right from wrong. She said, "Always remember that you are our son and what you say and do reflects on us." It was a sobering thought that kept hammering at my conscience. In the midst of temptations, remember that your deeds and words reflect upon your heavenly Father: When He forgives and cleanses us, not only does it make us whole, but it reflects upon Him that all may see His power, His grace, and His glory.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Pique my conscience, Lord. Remind me when I tend to stray. Help me to turn around and get on the right path again. In Jesus' name, amen.



## SWEPT AWAY LIKE A CLOUD

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 44:18-23

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you (Isaiah 44:22, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Open My Eyes That I May See”

At 5:30 this morning I checked out of a motel in Orlando, Florida, to head for the airport and to fly back to Cincinnati. The rental car was covered with dew, so the windows had to be cleaned. It was a “misty-moisty morning” with a little fog. By the time the plane took off at 7:30 A.M., most of the fog had begun to dissipate. From aloft we could see pockets of clouds nestled like cotton candy among the tree tops.

Have you ever felt that your life was in a fog because of mistakes you made or sins that subtly crept into your routine? Have you ever wished that the cataracts on your eyes could be removed so things would not appear so fuzzy or distorted? Like the smog that settles over Los Angeles and other industrial cities to obscure the sun, prevent our distant vision, and burn our eyes, sin hides the way of godliness and truth. The more we sin, the more difficult it is to see God.

How beautiful is the bright sunshine when the mists of unrighteousness and the clouds of sin are swept away by the loving forgiveness of God!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Take away the mists that cover my eyes and open my vision so that I may see truth, righteousness, and the face of my God. Amen.

August 19

## WORSHIPPING GOD'S WAY

**SCRIPTURE:** John 4:19-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His Holy name (Psalm 103:1, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Sweet Sweet Spirit"

Come rain or shine, snow storm or flood waters we could always count on our family being in church on Sunday (not to mention Sunday night and Wednesday night).

I admit I went through a rebellious stage with my parents where I didn't think it necessary to attend church—besides, I said, you could worship God anywhere.

But, what I didn't know at the time was that while I sat in that church building, I slowly learned to truly worship with the love of God—His spirit—His inner love and that there was more to worship than the building.

One special worship I will always treasure was in the solitude of a hospital room. I had given birth to our long awaited son and due to complications had an extended stay. As I cradled that precious little bundle in my arms and prayed to God, my heart was filled with joy, adoration, and praise for the miracle of life. I communed with God as tear drops showered our son's squinted little face. I worshipped in prayer because God had touched my life and His spirit dwelled in me.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, thank You for creating us to worship. To experience awe and wonder for Your creation. Help us not only to worship You more fully through our adoration and praise, but to worship in our service to You and our fellow man. May our actions be pleasing as a sweet fragrance to You. Amen.

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August 19-25. **Georgia C. Ling** resides in Everett, Washington, with her husband, Phil and their son, Philip. She writes a weekly column, *From Georgia's Heart*, and contributes to several regional newspapers.

## TO BOW OR NOT TO BOW?

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 95:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Come let us worship and bow down: Let us kneel before the Lord our God our Maker (Psalm 95:6, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “How Great Thou Art”

You may remember the controversy a few years ago over the First Lady of the United States of America meeting the Queen of England. The debate was whether or not to bow to the Queen, as was the custom, upon introduction. Would she be lowering her status?

All cameras were focused in on that moment. The world watched as she extended her hand to the Queen for a good old fashion American hand shake..

I confess I was rooting for the hand shake. We Americans are a proud people. We bow down to no one.

Yet, as Christians, one act of worship is to literally bow down and worship our God. It's an act of reverence, humility and servitude.

At the dedication of the temple Solomon had a special platform constructed and placed in the midst of the court. In the presence of all of the assembly of Israel, this mighty King knelt on his knees and prayed to God. Giving Him praise and honor due only to the Almighty Provider.

God takes pleasure and delight in His creation when we worship and praise Him.

A good old American handshake just won't do for God, we have to come before Him bowed, on bended knees.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, help us come to You in humiliation, awe, and reference. Let us experience true worship of You. Amen.

August 21

## INGREDIENTS FOR WORSHIP

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 96:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** In my Father's house are many dwelling places, if it were not so I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you (John 14:2, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Will Serve Thee"

I enjoy entertaining. My husband especially enjoys it since his main job is compiling the guest list and clearing his calendar for the evening. If it's a full sit-down dinner, I have to insist on having only three couples for what I call "Supper for Six." He thinks six or twelve, what's the difference?

Well, I'll tell you the difference. It's preparation! And if he wants a hostess with the mostess, he must realize I can only prepare for so many.

Preparation not only is the key ingredient to a dinner party, it's a must also for worship.

The Psalmist gave us some great day-to-day ingredients to successful worship. It includes singing songs of deliverance; blessing His name; each day telling someone that He saves; worship only God, the God who made the heavens; bask in His splendor and glory; and bring our offering to worship Him with the beauty of holy lives.

Whether it's an intimate worship of just the Lord and me or an auditorium filled to overflowing, to give and receive the most out of worship, I must be prepared.

I love worshipping; I even love preparing for it. And believe me, preparation does make the difference.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, let us come before You with joy, honor, glory and thanksgiving in our hearts as we worship Your Holy name. In the name of Your Son, I pray. Amen.

## I JUST WANT TO BE WHERE YOU ARE

**SCRIPTURE:** Revelation 14:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** One thing that I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek; That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple (Psalm 27:4, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “O, That Will Be Glory”

One sunny morning my preschooler and I cruised down the highway. Windows were open, we had wind-blown hair, and the stereo was cranked up with one of my favorite Christian music tapes.

My son has this thing about not allowing anyone but himself to sing with the tapes, so we were just listening, since he didn't know the words, so I thought. To my surprise he started singing with the vocalists, “I just want to be where you are, in your dwelling place forever.” Then he stopped and asked, “Mom, what does that mean? Who do they want to be with?”

I turned off the tape and explained to him that someday we would live with God and worship Him in person, like we worship now, but we will be able to see him face to face in all His glory. Well, of course many questions followed and I attempted to answer them one by one.

He seemed pretty satisfied and sat in unusual silence for a few moments. Then in a soft, sweet voice he said, “Mommy, I think I want to live with God, someday.” As Christians, our desire is to live with God and to worship and praise Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, assist us in our worship so we can have a taste of what worship in Heaven will be like. Be with us in our daily walk as we share Your love with others. I pray this prayer today, in the name of Your Son and my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

August 23

## WHO'S THE BOSS?

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 43:8-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And God said to Moses, "I Am who I Am; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the son's of Israel, I Am has sent me to you" (Exodus 3:14, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "His Name Is Wonderful"

When our son was a toddler, my husband enjoyed asking this little fellow, "Who is the boss"? He would look straight into his daddy's eyes with confidence and say, "I am!"

Of course with the male ego involved, my husband would respond with, "No you're not, I am."

They would banter back and forth until finally the little guy would give up and say, "O.K., we'll take turns being the boss."

We find throughout the Scripture that from time to time God had to remind the children of Israel just who was boss. Just like us, they would forget God's deliverance and mighty works and He would in a dramatic way send them friendly reminders.

The children of Israel weren't the only ones who didn't know who was boss. When the Pharisees asked Jesus who his father was he responded, "You shall die in your sins unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" John 8:24, (*New American Standard Bible*).

Unlike my son, God does not allow us to take turns in being the boss. He is the creator. There is no other God, there never was and never will be. We are to worship Him and Him alone, and tell others of His mighty works.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, our minute minds can not fathom Your mighty being, yet, we are in awe and worship and praise Your majestic name. Help us as we share Your glory with others. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

## I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 22:6-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Blessed are they who did not see, yet believed (John 20:29. *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I'll Tell the World That I'm a Christian"

The year after we first set up housekeeping a burglar broke into our home. I happened to be upstairs asleep and alone. I awoke and as he approached our bedroom door, I met him with a loaded firearm. His best interest was to flee and that's just what he did, with me on his heels. I gave the police a detailed description of the intruder, with the color, make, model and license of his car. He was arrested that day.

When we went to trial the attorney for the defense questioned me, "Mrs. Ling, even though you are blind in one eye, you say you could identify this man?"

I felt like I was on trial, but my answer was, "Yes, without a doubt this is the man that was in my house."

The defense attorney knew his client's future was in my testimony, the key eyewitness. He would try to discredit me in any way possible.

The apostle Paul was constantly defending his appointment as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He literally saw the Light and heard the voice of Jesus. Yet, there were skeptics.

We encounter skeptics, but like Paul, we are to be witnesses to all men for Jesus.

It's our job to witness and it's God's job to convict.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, give us courage to be Your key witnesses as we tell others of what You've done in our lives. Let us stand firm and not waver in our convictions. Thank You for your Son, Jesus. We want to be like Him. In His name, we pray. Amen.

August 25

## SET SAIL

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 28:16-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Follow me and I will make you fishers of men (Matthew 4:19, *New American Standard Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I'll Go Where You Want Me To Go"

When we moved to Seattle, Washington, I was introduced to sailing by way of living near a marina. I loved watching the sail boats go in and out of the harbor. I personally felt more secure with a motor powered boat, but the sail boats had this intriguing quality as you watched the wind catch the sails and the boat would glide over the water as the wind empowered the vessel.

As the disciples came to meet Jesus at the mountain where he ascended, Scripture records that when they saw Him, they worshipped Him. You can envision them bowing down at the Master's feet, anticipating instructions from Jesus.

It was there He gave them the Great Commission.

I don't think it was a coincidence that worship preceded His commandment.

The disciples were His vessels, like a sail boat that floats calmly in the water, waiting for the wind.

Worship was the wind that empowered the disciples ministry.

These disciple fishermen were now definitely able bodied seamen, both physically and spiritually as they served their risen Lord, fishing for men.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, as we go about our day-to-day lives, let us worship You in our service as we attempt to make disciples, fulfilling the Great Commission. Help us understand the importance of worship of You. Let our sails be filled with worship and praise of our Creator. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



## WHEN THE HEAT IS ON

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 18:26-36

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** "Trust ye in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength (Isaiah 26:4).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Who Is on the Lord's Side?"

Intimidation. That was the name of the game for the ancient Assyrians. I once journeyed to northern Iraq to visit the remains of their ancient cities. Everything they made was on a huge scale. Reliefs of the king and his attendants were more than twice life size.

Scenes of battle were carved onto the walls of their palaces: besieged cities, flaming buildings, siege towers, battering rams, and dying enemies. The Assyrians were proud of their brutality and their success in warfare. Arrogant and belligerent, they came against Judah.

It was a tense moment. On one side were the representatives of King Hezekiah of Judah, whose main defense strategy was prayer to God. On the other was the haughty Assyrian commander with his huge army. And on the wall were the trembling people of Jerusalem, whose lives and property hung in the balance. Had you been on the wall, would you have been confident of the outcome?

Whom do you listen to when the heat is on: the voice of fear and defeat or the voice of confidence in the true and living God?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, help us to honor Your name and Your people. Help us to withstand those who ridicule our dependence on You. Help us not to be intimidated by the forces of evil. Amen.

**August 27**

## **DO NOT BE AFRAID**

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 19:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me (2 Kings 19:6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Just When I Need Him Most”

Abdul-Hamid II, Sultan of Turkey from 1876 to 1909, lived in constant fear of assassination. His rooms contained alarm systems, trap doors, and mirrors set at angles. There were life-sized models of himself standing at windows, sitting in chairs, and reclining on sofas; but he himself was seldom seen. Fear made him a captive.

In a cuneiform inscription Sennacherib boasted: “As for Hezekiah of Judah, who did not submit to my yoke, forty-six of his strong walled cities, as well as innumerable small cities in their neighborhood, I besieged with scaling ladders, siege engines, infantry, breaches, mines, and tunnelling and I conquered them. Himself I shut up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem.” But Sennacherib did not claim to have taken Jerusalem. Despite Sennacherib’s boasts, Hezekiah stood firm in God’s promise of deliverance.

What are the fears of your life? Do they hold you captive? Do they hem you in? Do they sap your strength? Let God take them captive. As the writer of Proverbs put it, “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe” (29:25, *New International Version*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, we thank You that You have not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. You are our strength, our refuge, and our hope. Amen.

## INSULTING GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 19:14-19

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God (2 Kings 19:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Need Thee Every Hour"

Sennacherib made the mistake of insulting the true and living God. He had been very successful in warfare. The cities and nations that had fallen before him had called in vain on their deities for salvation. He assumed that the same would be true of Judah and Jerusalem.

Sennacherib thought the God of Hezekiah was as powerless as the gods of the nations he had conquered. Hezekiah knew otherwise. He prayed to the God who is sovereign over all the kingdoms of the earth, the God who created all things.

Sennacherib was soon to learn that the God of Judah was unlike the idols of the pagan nations.

During the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was asked if God was on the side of the Union. He replied that he hoped the Union was on God's side.

Many times we are more intent on getting God to do our bidding than on doing the bidding of God. Long before he found himself in this crisis situation, Hezekiah set an example by seeking to do the will of God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Sovereign God, help us to be more concerned about doing Your will than about getting Your help to satisfy our needs and desires. Help us to be like Hezekiah, who relied on You in his times of distress and boldly called upon You to make yourself known to the world through Your provision for Your people. Amen.

**August 29**

## **THE FINEST HOUR**

**SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 19:29-34**

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant (2 Kings 19:34, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY: “Abide With Me”**

Winston Churchill, anticipating an invasion of his land by the Nazis, rallied his people with these words: “Let us, therefore, brace ourselves to our duty, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, ‘This was their finest hour.’”

The defense of Jerusalem against the overwhelming Assyrian force was Jerusalem’s finest hour. The city was defended, not by its strong walls or the bravery of its people, but by almighty God himself.

When 185,000 of his soldiers died mysteriously in the night, the proud Assyrian king, Sennacherib, withdrew to Nineveh. There he was assassinated by his sons (2 Kings 19:35-37).

The “remnant” in Jerusalem, weak and powerless in human terms, had survived and would take root downward and bear fruit upward, for God’s hand was upon it and He was committed to its past and to its future.

When we get discouraged and feel helpless in this world that is so hostile to belief, we need to remember that God is not cowed by the pretensions of men and women.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Sovereign God, You stand by the faithful. Nothing evil can overcome us if we put our lives in Your hands. Help us not to be fearful as we live out our lives. Amen.

## PRAYER AND THE BATTLE WITH SICKNESS AND DEATH

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 20:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord (2 Kings 20:5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “God Will Take Care of You”

Prayer played a key role in Hezekiah’s battle with his external enemies, the Assyrians. It likewise played a key role in his battle with sickness. A boil brought infection that nearly took Hezekiah’s life, but Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. He reminded the Lord of his faithfulness and devotion.

God heard his prayer and healed him dramatically. In addition to the restoration of health, he received a promise of fifteen years more of life.

Here was one more sign of God’s abiding concern for the faithful. No matter what the enemy, God is our source of victory.

For nearly 30 years, bodies have remained frozen at an underground storage facility near Los Angeles. It is hoped that, at some time in the future, when cures have been found for the diseases that took their lives, these people can be brought to life again.

Hezekiah had none of the wonders of modern science, but he had something far more powerful—prayer and a pure heart. And he served an all-powerful God who was very fond of him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Eternal and all wise Provider, we thank You for the mystery of health and happiness. We ask for good health and long and productive lives. Whether healed by prayer or poultice, we acknowledge You as the giver and prolonger of life. Amen.

August 31

## BAD NEWS/GOOD NEWS

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 20:8-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Then the prophet Isaiah called upon the Lord, and the Lord made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz (2 Kings 20:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord”

We’ve all laughed at bad news/good news jokes, like the one about the surgeon talking to his patient. “I’ve got good news and bad news,” he says. “The bad news is that we amputated the wrong leg. The good news is that you can get around just fine on the one you have left.”

Sick, Hezekiah had received bad news from God: “Put your house in order, because you will die; you will not recover” (20:1, *New International Version*).

He wept and prayed. Then came the good news from God: “I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.”

Good news. Within three days he’d be on his feet in the temple. God would protect him from the Assyrians and add fifteen years to his life. Good news.

Hezekiah could scarcely believe his ears. He wanted a sign to assure him that the good news was true, and God graciously granted it. We’re not sure whether the king was looking at a sundial or a stairway, but he saw the shadow moving backward instead of forward.

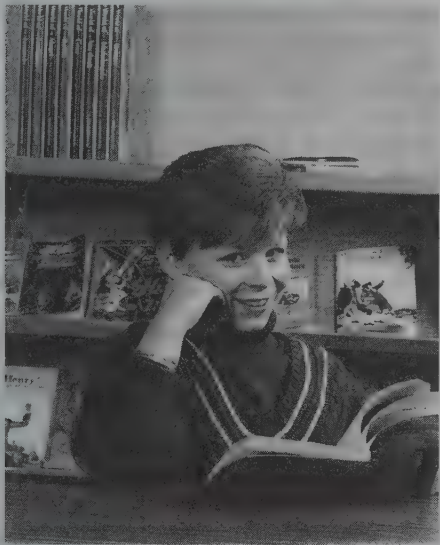
Not everyone has his prayer granted so dramatically, but we are reminded that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, our lives seem so short and we want to do so much for You. Please help us to work wisely and well. Amen.

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# DEVOTIONS

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## September

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photo by H. Armstrong Roberts

September 1

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Chronicles 32:27-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook (2 Chronicles 32:30, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"

I stood waist deep in icy water. The boy ahead of me held above his head a flickering lighter. The light went out and I wondered why I had so wanted to walk through Hezekiah's Tunnel that connects the Pool of Gihon and the Pool of Siloam.

I was walking through one of the oldest of Jerusalem's antiquities, virtually undisturbed since 700 B.C. In the intermittent darkness, with the unreliable light, I felt uneasy. I wondered if Hezekiah himself had ever explored the tunnel. Had he followed a servant with an oil lamp even as I followed the boy with the lighter?

What a remarkable man Hezekiah was! The Bible tells us he succeeded in everything he undertook. What were the keys to his success?

He did what was right in the eyes of God. He called the people to do right. The chronicler wrote: "In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered" (2 Chronicles 31:21).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, help us to so live and so work that Your blessing can rest upon our lives and labors. May it be said of us that we sought You and that we worked wholeheartedly. Amen.



## DEPENDABLE WORKERS

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 22:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings (Proverbs 22:29).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Work, for the Night Is Coming"

Grandpa used to talk about a person's word being as good as his (or her) bond. Workmen and employers would agree on the work to be done and the payment to be made for it. Sometimes they would seal the agreement with a handshake, but honest men would keep their word without any formal contracts or requirements. A faulty memory was the only thing that could make trouble among honest persons. That is still true.

Second Chronicles 34:8-13 also tells the story of Josiah's dependable workmen. King Josiah arranged for God's neglected temple to be repaired. The Levites working with Josiah's officers collected money from the people of Judah and the neighboring tribes to buy material and pay carpenters and stone masons to do the work. The Levites took care of the temple and helped in the ceremonies of worship, so Josiah arranged for them to oversee the work and pay the workers. What an opportunity for cheating both ways! But these were God's people doing God's business, and they did it honestly. Those who are really God's people will be dependable workers, with or without the motivation of Labor Day!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thanks to God, our heavenly Father, for the example of Josiah and his dependable workers. Thanks especially for Jesus, who provided the perfect example of selfless service in working and giving His life for us. Let us follow Him, no matter what others may do.

September 3

## NEGLECTED HOMEWORK

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 22:8-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book (2 Kings 22:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Teach Me Thy Will, O Lord"

Now that school is starting, we'll probably hear arguments about homework. I am in favor of it. I don't mean just studying books at home; I mean actually doing what is taught in the books. If the books make no difference in what you do, they might as well be on the shelf.

That's the way it was with the book of the law. It had been put away in the temple and forgotten for a long time. People no longer were doing what it taught them to do. Then King Josiah ordered the building to be repaired and cleaned up. That sacred scroll of Deuteronomy (at least), was discovered in the housecleaning and was read by the high priest and then by the scribe. He brought it and as the housecleaning went on, a priest found the forgotten book and gave it to the man in charge of the cleanup. That man read it to the king.

The book of the law required homework. It demanded that the people do what it said, worshiping the Lord God and living according to His commandments. It spelled out disastrous consequences for failure to follow God's way, and King Josiah could see those consequences developing. He was thoroughly frightened. The nation needed to start now on its homework as directed by the book.

How about your homework as directed by the Bible?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Praise God for His Word—His Son and His Book. Ask forgiveness for the neglect that too often leaves the Book unread and the Son unheeded. Plead for greater diligence in homework.

## WHO IS TALKING, AND WHAT IS BEING SAID?

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 22:14-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23, 24).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Once to Every Man and Nation"

In an election campaign one hears a lot of talk about the people who are talking, as though that were more important than what they are saying about the issues to be decided. The same sort of thing happens among some churches, where folk attend or stay away, depending on their opinion of the preacher, rather than on the biblical content of the teaching. A nation needs leaders who know its problems and how to solve them; a church needs leaders who teach God's Word.

Hilkiah the priest and King Josiah's other friends wanted to hear what God had to say. For some reason they did not go to the famous prophets, Jeremiah and Zephaniah. They went to Huldah, who is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. They received God's answer—the same answer any true prophet would have given. The nation would be destroyed for turning away from God; but because King Josiah was serving God faithfully and leading the nation to serve Him, the destruction would not come in Josiah's lifetime.

The world still needs God's Word, delivered faithfully from the Bible, no matter who the speaker is.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for faithful messengers of His Word, whoever they have been and wherever and whenever they have appeared. Ask for listening ears and a searching spirit to hear and to identify God's truth; then to follow wherever it leads. Ask in the name of Jesus, who is the Truth.

**September 5**

## **MOST NOTABLE**

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 23:21-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (Deuteronomy 6:5).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O Worship the King"

Who is the greatest man or woman you know personally? Whom now living do you most admire? Who stands out as greatest in all our nation's history? Who is greatest in the world? As you consider these questions you probably find yourself choosing for different reasons.

Did you name someone because you like him or her? A hero who led an army? A king or president? A good businessman? Someone who helped many people?.

You probably chose Jesus as greatest of all, but not for the same reason as you named other heroes. As a Christian you came finally toward seeing from God's viewpoint. You remembered God's saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

So we come at last to measure King Josiah. Not a victorious warrior like David, nor world famous for wisdom and wealth like Solomon, he still is remembered in the Bible as tops among Judah's kings for turning to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might. That kind of greatness in relation to God is available to us! Hallelujah!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for the Book that lets us see people and history from His viewpoint. Give thanks, too, for His Son, His Word, and His Spirit to bring us into right relationship with Him for time and eternity. Give praise to the Lord Jesus, the way of true and eternal greatness.

## I CAN DO IT MYSELF

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 23:26-30

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Abide With Me”

“Aw, Mom, quit worrying! Nothing’s going to happen to me. You know I’m a good driver.”

A dangerous time in almost any new development comes when the learner “has mastered” the procedure and goes ahead confidently by himself. That applies to walking or climbing, operating a car or any other machine, dating, conducting a public service, or you name it.

The people of Judah thought they could manage their own affairs. King Josiah ordered them to obey God’s law, but their hearts were not in it. Soon the good king would be gone, and they would go back to the ways of bad King Manasseh. God would let the nation be destroyed.

Even King Josiah took it upon himself to oppose the armies of the Egyptian king at Megiddo, outside the boundaries of Judah, without consulting anyone about God’s view of the matter. The Egyptian king claimed that God sent him, and Scripture supports his claim (2 Chronicles 35:20-27). But Josiah persisted, losing his own life and making his nation subservient to Egypt. Even godly people sometimes go too far on their own, and their friends need to be concerned.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Praise God for the truthfulness of His Word, revealing the flaws in even the best of His servants. Plead for the wisdom to act always under His direction, without the fear that grips those who have no confidence in Him. Thank Him for Jesus, who provides forgiveness for our failures.

September 7

## COMMITTED TO THE COURSE

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 119:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Higher Ground”

“Graduates of my school really have it made. They are respected wherever they go. They are in demand for good jobs with high salaries and excellent provisions for retirement. They can take good care of their families. . . . But wait a minute. I haven’t graduated yet. First I have to get busy at the studies—the class work and reading and writing assignments and projects and examinations.

Psalm 119:1-8 reads something like this, doesn’t it?. Great blessing attends those who keep God’s law without wavering, who walk in His way without doing any wrong. But I haven’t graduated yet from that course. All I can claim is that I have signed up for it and am fully determined to follow it to completion with the help of God. I pray fervently for that help and fully expect to receive it: “O forsake me not utterly.”

Much the same thought was expressed later by the apostle Paul: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Philippians 3:12, *New International Version*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Pray that God will accept our fervent commitment to His will and His way, supplying the strength and steadfastness we need to hold the course. Praise Him for grace through Jesus Christ.

## THE WAY WITH THE WORD

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 119:9-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee (Psalm 119:11).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Wonderful Words of Life"

Our suburban home was hard to find, on a winding street with no direct access to any thoroughfare. Visitors frequently said, "Come and meet us at some place we can reach." So I was more than a little surprised when a friend from the ancient past showed up at my workplace saying, "I went to your house and you weren't there, so I thought I might find you here."

"How could you have found that hidden haven?" I asked.

"Simple," he said. "Here's your address, and your name is on the door mat. I found your address in the telephone directory, and I found the place by using a street map. Nothing to it."

How can a person possibly know and follow the way God wants us to go? It's simple (but not always easy). God has provided directions in His written Word. Psalm 119:8-16 makes many references to our spiritual road map: "Where-withal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. . . . Thy word have I hid in mine heart. . . . Teach me thy statutes. . . . I will meditate in thy precepts. . . . I will not forget thy word." That's what shows the way home.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God that He has not left us to wander in the ways of any man's imagination, but has shown us His way through His Word. Pray for wisdom and willingness to follow that way faithfully, and help others to find it too. May Jesus the living way be honored.

September 9

## HANDMADE BY GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 139:13-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring' (Acts 17:28, *New King James Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Jesus Loves the Little Children"

Storyteller Garrison Keillor says that, as a child, he didn't like the idea of riding around inside his mother until birth. It made more sense to think a bird brought him to the doorstep and rang the doorbell.

"Here's your baby! "

"Thank you very much."

"Want some more?"

"Well, we'll see how this one works out."

"Okay," says Mr. Stork, and flaps away.

We all know more than that about the facts of life. But King David saw more than just Dad and Mom getting together. He knew God also was in on the act. God wove a person together in his mother's womb.

"Where did I come from?" The stork didn't bring you, but you still came from above. God gave Mom and Dad the power to make you. God watched you develop. God stood with the doctor in the delivery room. God knows your name.

Boy, you're special! As a matter of fact, everybody is! So let's treat everyone we meet as handmade by God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, thank You for making me. Thank You for bringing me into this world. Let me see everyone I meet as Your creation. Help me to respect them. Amen.

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September 9-15. **Gary Robinson** is the founding evangelist of Christ's Church in Kent, Ohio. He and his wife, Barbara, have two children, Ruth and Alexander.



## BIZARROS

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 2:4-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22, *New King James Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian in My Heart”

The *Superman* comics used to feature imperfect duplicates of the Man of Steel and Lois Lane. They were called “Bizarros,” and they did everything backward. When the alarm clock rang, they went to bed! They lived by a wacky code that said, “Us hate beauty, us love ugliness.”

These fictional dunderheads had nothing on the people whom Jeremiah describes. They bit the hand that fed them. They knelt before idols that knew less than they did. They made, Jeremiah said, cracked cisterns that would hold no water.

In short, they moved backward instead of forward. They acted as if they had no sense.

Of course God’s people are not so foolish now. Or are they? What a “Bizarro” code some churches could write:

“Jesus wants us love; us fight.”

“Jesus wants us give; us keep.”

“Jesus wants us worship Him; us worship other things.”

It’s not funny. Forsaking God leads to tragedy. Forsaking God cost Israel her nation. What might it be costing us?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, help me to get it right. Help me to remember what Your Word actually says—and do what it says. Help me not to be an imperfect duplicate of a Christian, but the real thing. Amen.

September 11

## BANG! YOU'RE NOT DEAD!

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 1:18—2:3

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Ephesians 6:13, *New King James Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

On TV I saw a reporter who volunteered to be shot! When the gunman fired, the impact was more than the brave journalist expected. He staggered, cursed, and said, "That hurt!" If he hadn't been wearing that bulletproof vest, the shot would have done more than hurt!

As much as I admire this man's bravery, I admire the courage of Jeremiah even more. Jeremiah stood against a hail of "bullets" and he couldn't look down and see his protection.

"I have made you this day a fortified city (Jeremiah 1:18, *New King James Version*). God was saying He would make His spokesman able not only to dish it out but to take it.

Ah, but it's hard to trust an invisible God, isn't it? It's far easier to say we're not the ones God wants for risky assignments.

We'll avoid the danger that way. We won't suffer the sting of Satan's dart. But we'll also miss the thrill of finding ourselves still standing after the smoke clears. We'll miss the joy of finding God's promises true.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, thank You for giving us assignments like preaching the gospel and standing up for what's right. When I'm afraid, help me realize that You will always protect me from harm. You will give me the strength to do what You want done. Amen.

## THE WINNING TEAM

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 50:4-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58, *New King James Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Onward Christian Soldiers”

I think it was Franklin D. Roosevelt who said, “I would rather fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail.”

When God calls us to be His spokesmen, His servants, His soldiers, the most foolish thing we can say is “No.” Why? Because His cause will ultimately succeed.

True, history does teach us that the godless world hates God and His people. Isaiah, Paul, Jesus—all these felt the wrath of “the powers that be.” As Isaiah wrote of himself and, prophetically, of Christ, “I gave my back to those who struck me” (Isaiah 50:6, *New King James Version*).

And yet history also teaches us that “the powers that be” are passing away. Where is the Rome that beheaded Paul and crucified Jesus? She’s gone, a mere memory; but “like a mighty army moves the church of God.”

So never mind your fear. Forget your failures. Keep doing whatever it is you’re doing for God. As Isaiah put it, set your face like a flint.

Remember, you’re on the winning team.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, when the going gets tough, help me to remember what Isaiah said, “Behold, the Lord God will help me.” Those who oppose You and Your servants will wear themselves out hammering on the anvil of the church. Keep me strong and faithful. Amen.

**September 13**

## **KEEP ON KEEPING ON!**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 15:15-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Galatians 6:9).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?”

I remember talking on the phone with a disillusioned preacher. He'd come to his congregation ablaze with truth; he left sodden with reality. His message was, “Repent!” Their message was, “You're fired!” I felt his pain.

But it's not just the preacher who suffers for telling the truth. I know Christians in all walks of life, of all ages, who've been shoved out into the cold. They've lost friends, been rejected by family, because they stood for God. I've felt that pain. You've felt that anguish.

We aren't the only ones who've suffered. If we look back over our shoulders, we see we're standing in a line stretching as far back as Jeremiah the prophet.

“Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable?” he asked. God didn't answer that question. He said, in effect, “Jeremiah, if you can't beat 'em. . . stay right where you are! Don't give up. Who knows? Some of your countrymen may see the error of their ways and join you. But whatever happens, Jeremiah, stick with it.”

Lonely? Frustrated? Depressed? You're in good company. Keep on keeping on!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, when it seems easier to join them than to beat them, help me see that those aren't my only options. Help me understand that You're not so interested in my success as in my courage and faithfulness. Help me stay strong and brave for You. Amen.

## **PAYING THE PRICE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 20:7-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus"

Have you ever noticed that those who speak for God pay a price? Simply ask the people who strive to set moral standards for television and magazines. They have been made into outlaws in media circles and have been the target of pornographers.

Society agrees: It's all right to be religious as long as you keep it to yourself. Don't rock the boat or we'll toss you overboard. People can testify to this. Maybe you can too.

Jeremiah also paid a price for speaking the Word of God. Mocked and derided daily, he felt the sting of his people's rebuke. Nevertheless, he stayed at his prophetic post for 40 years. It would take more than scorn and slander, muck and mire, to stop him from obeying God.

What will stop us? A raised eyebrow? A snort of derision? Fear of losing a friend?

If we won't stand as lights in the darkness, how will we be able to stand in the light of God's judgment?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, we remember what Jesus said: Whoever would follow Him must shoulder a cross and follow Him. Help us to examine our discipleship to see whether it's real. Help us to obey You no matter what. Amen.

September 15

## WHEN THE LOAD GETS TOO HEAVY

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 20:13-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16 :33).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Reach Out to Jesus"

The Christmas film classic *It's a Wonderful Life* shows a man who wishes he'd never been born. George Bailey has poured his life into the little town of Bedford Falls, doing good through his building and loan business, battling greedy old Mr. Potter, whose evil threatens to engulf the town. Then George wonders whether it's all been for nothing. An angel grants his wish for non-existence. George sees the impact he's made and begs for his life back.

Jeremiah sometimes grew weary in his battles with sin and injustice. Today's Scripture reading shows him actually cursing the day he was born. So far as we know, no angel showed him what life would have been like without him. But Jeremiah came out of his depression and, with the help of God, entered the battle again.

Christian servant, are you growing weary in the struggle? Do you wonder what good, if any, you've accomplished? Remember this; in the sight of God, your effort is not wasted.

God wants you where you are, if you're in the battle for Him. God wants you to keep doing what you're doing. Live not for the praise of men, but for the praise of God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, this past week I've wrestled with my place in Your plans. I've been challenged to stay faithful where I am. Thank You that the ultimate victory is secure. Help me now to continue to do Your work and sing Your praise. Amen.

## HOW'S IT GOING?

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 7:16-26

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you (Jeremiah 7:23, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Trust and Obey"

Once when I was in elementary school, I did something at school that I knew I shouldn't have done. Since I wasn't known as a rulebreaker, it was fairly easy for me to get away without being caught. However, that night I wasn't able to sleep because I felt bad for what I had done. I went downstairs and talked to Mom about it. Then, at school the next day, I admitted to the teacher what I had done. As expected, I received the punishment I had been dreading; but still I felt much better than I had when no one else knew what I had done. That day I learned an important lesson about the difference in my heart between the guilt that comes with disobedience and the joy that comes through obedience.

Since God made our hearts, He knows all about that difference. He knows how much better we feel and how much better our lives go when we obey Him. The Israelites found that out the hard way by suffering the pain caused by disobedience. We have a choice: We also can learn the hard way, or we can recognize immediately the joy and peace that we can know if we obey God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, may we always know Your Word well enough to know what You want us to do and always have our hearts enough in tune with You to obey it. Amen.

September 17

## HIS JOB AND OURS

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 7:27-34

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "We'll Work Till Jesus Comes"

I teach composition to freshmen in college, and sometimes it can be a frustrating job. Many times it seems that my students are unwilling to put into use the things that I'm trying to help them understand. At those times, I'm tempted to let them feel the full force of my grading power. But then I stop and think about why I'm here. My task is to make understanding possible for them. I can't force it on them. They have to decide for themselves. When I keep that perspective, I'm able to look past the frustrations and enjoy graduation, knowing that I helped some students achieve their goals, whether they realize it or not.

The Christian life has some parallels to my teaching situation. We have been called to speak for God in our world, and it can be very frustrating when the people around us show no indication of listening to what we say or acting upon it. But there may be responses we do not see: and regardless of the response, we don't act as judges. We simply keep offering the salvation that can be found only in Christ.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, help us not to become frustrated in doing Your work or to respond in anger to those who need to hear Your message. Help us to continue to bring Your message of light and life to a dark and dying world. Amen.



## PEACE, PEACE

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 8:8-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace (Jeremiah 8:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Wonderful Peace"

One time I read an interview with an actress who was known for playing roles that showed her as a devoted wife and mother. The interview discussed the difference between that image and the problems she had in her life offscreen. The actress said, "In the movies, somebody gave me all the right things to say and do, so everything worked out perfectly. Nobody gave me the script for life."

In our world, many try to cover up the problems brought about by sin by pretending that they don't exist or that they can be easily remedied. God gives us a much different picture. He tells us that the problem of sin cuts right to the heart, and the cure won't work unless it cuts just as deeply. God designed a wonderful conclusion for our lives, but there is no way to reach that conclusion without allowing God to make us new creatures. The wonderful news is that He offers to do just that. When we come to Him in faith, He cleanses us with the blood of His Son and recreates us in Him. What's more, He has given us a "script for life" so that we can live victoriously now and share peace with Him for eternity.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, we do want peace in our lives. Help us to realize that You are the only true source of peace. Then help us convey that message to others so that they may also know Your peace, which nothing on earth can take from us. Amen.

September 19

## SOURCE OF HEALING

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 8:18-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** On each side of the river stood the tree of life. . . . And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "A Balm in Gilead"

Have you ever been frustrated trying to find a particular item in a store? Perhaps you looked in every department you thought might possibly have the item, but turned up nothing. Then at last you asked someone for assistance. To your surprise, the item was there all along. You had just been overlooking it.

Like the people of Israel in Jeremiah's time, the people in our culture look everywhere for healing from emotional and spiritual hurts: everywhere, that is, except the one place that healing can truly be found. Christ provides the only true source of healing, but He is a source that never runs dry. No matter how many turn to Him with their needs, He is always more than able to supply all they need and even able to give more than they could ask or imagine. Is it any wonder that God questions critically those who turn to sources that cannot supply what is needed?

When we're sick and a doctor prescribes medicine that can cure us, we would be foolish not to take it. How much more foolish it would be to turn down the all-powerful, all-healing God when He offers us Himself!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, You are the Great Physician, who not only has the power to heal us but also has the compassion to feel our pain. Thank You for offering Yourself to us in that way. Help us to lean on You in our times of need, knowing of Your willingness and ability to care for us. Amen.

## WHAT ARE YOU PROUD OF?

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 9:12-24

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth (Jeremiah 9:24, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Tell Me the Stories of Jesus"

When it comes right down to it, bragging is really pretty foolish for two reasons. First of all, most people really don't have that much to brag about. I remember hearing a story of someone saying to Abraham Lincoln, "I'm proud to say that I'm a self-made man." President Lincoln responded, "Well, we know where the blame belongs, then."

Our true inadequacies lead to the second reason that bragging is foolish: It's usually based not on truth but on what we would like truth to be. With these two factors working against boasting, it's not too surprising that most of the things people brag about (money, abilities, possessions, positions) really don't seem like much when you look at the place they hold in the world at large.

However, one object of boasting defies the limitations because it is greater than all of the others combined. Our relationship with God is something worth bragging about because it's based not on who we are but on who He is and what His love for us means. If we give this matter of boasting all the time it deserves, there won't be time for any other.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, we want to know You. We want to be so full of our relationship with You that it is all we can talk about, that, when people see us, they will come to know You through us. Amen.

**September 21**

## **A USEFUL POT**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 18:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand” (Jeremiah 18:6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”

My three-year-old daughter loves to play with modeling dough. She has great ideas of what we should make, and she is nearly always pleased with the outcome of our attempts. However, she is never so satisfied with any one thing that she is unwilling to smash it and make something better. I might try to convince her to leave something as it is, but she is convinced that she has something better in mind. And she’s usually right.

God’s view of our lives is much different from our view of them. He sees the whole picture clearly: past, present, and future. We have a distorted image of the past and present, and know even less about the future. Is it any wonder, then, that at times He sees the need for change in our lives before we do? But if we trust Him to do the molding of our lives, He will come up with beauty and usefulness that we don’t even dream to be possible. Smashing the old pot may be scary and painful, but the end result is worth the difficulty. And we can rest assured because we know the one who is molding us and we know that He loves each of us as His own child.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, help us to look beyond the comfort we may feel in our current condition and beyond the fear we may feel in the uncertainty of the future. Let us trust You to mold and shape us so that we may be the most useful instruments we can be for You. Amen.

## THE REAL POWER

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 10:1-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** No one is like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is mighty in power (Jeremiah 10:6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

My brother is seven years older than I am. When we were children he resented my tagging along and being in his way. Consequently he took joy in torturing me. The room where we stayed when we visited Grandmother had a walk-in closet, and on one of the shelves in that closet was a coconut decorated to look like a shrunken head. I felt a fear of that object, a fear that my brother capitalized on in the night. However, in the daylight I could see the object for what it was: just a clumsily decorated coconut.

We may be frightened by things we perceive to have power. That power may seem to reside in people, in situations, in governments, in violence, in the media, or in many other places. However, when we look at all of these things in the light of God's Word, we see that only God has power forever. But we don't have to fear His power. In fact, we can share in it. He offers it freely to us: power to overcome temptation, power to rise above the sufferings of the current time, power to share His message with others. He is not only the ultimate holder of power but also the ultimate supplier of it.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, we praise You for the power You possess and for the way You willingly offer that power to us. Help us to draw on that power in every situation and to give You continual glory for what it accomplishes. Amen.

## THE BIG PICTURE

**SCRIPTURE:** Habakkuk 1:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Great Is the Lord"

An old adage suggests that we often "cannot see the forest for the trees." This means that when we are in dense woods we can see only the trees that are near us. It is impossible to view the entire forest. Flying over the area in a plane would enable us to see the vast expanse of the woodlands.

Little Johnny stomps and cries and pouts when parents firmly tell him, "No!" He feels deprived, ill-treated. Mom and Dad have a broader view. They see a danger or consequence that Johnny does not see.

Our limited vision prevents us from understanding the big picture or from seeing the "whole forest." God's plan far exceeds our limits. He knows the proper time for reward or punishment. His ways are beyond our ways. His knowledge far exceeds our restricted understanding. All things continue to work together for good to those who love the Lord and are the called according to His purpose and His plan (Romans 8:28). Evil may seem to be unchecked, unpunished. This was Habakkuk's problem. But rest assured, evil will be punished at the proper time, unless the evildoers repent and are forgiven.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Help me not to cry and pout when things don't go my way and I cannot see Your plan. Help me to understand and accept that Your way is right and best. In Jesus' name, amen.

## GOD, OUR EVER-PRESENT HELP

**SCRIPTURE:** Habakkuk 1:12-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY** O Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish (Habakkuk 1:12, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Our God Reigns”

A popular evangelist once preached a sermon our family has not forgotten. Try this experiment. Draw a line from one end of a large sheet of paper to the other. Now somewhere in the middle of that line place a dot. When you face a problem or question that seems overwhelming, picture it as just a dot on the line of eternity. A child's loss of a favorite toy, a broken teenage romance, a major house or car repair—all dots.

But God is everlasting. He was there when the earth was nearly destroyed by the great flood. Noah and his family were spared. He was there when the Jews were in captivity and Daniel was thrown to the lions. He was there when Paul was thrown into prison, and the gospel was carried into the king's palace.

He was there when He allowed His Son to be crucified for our sins and raised Him from the grave that we also might have eternal life.

He is there when you think He may not be listening. He will be there when your descendants have doubts and fears. God is everlasting, and He is in control.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, God for being there at all times, whether I'm in trouble or in joy. You are wonderful and almighty, my Savior. Amen.

September 25

## YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT

**SCRIPTURE:** Habakkuk 2:5-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And you may be sure that your sin will find you out (*Numbers 32:23, New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “At Calvary”

It was many years ago. As a young boy, I knew it was wrong to smoke. Many adults smoked, but my parents carefully taught me the evils of the filthy weed. But someone (probably an older boy) suggested that I try it. “Smoking is fun,” he said. In the absence of tobacco, I tried corn silks. I had heard someone say they worked almost as well.

A friend and I decided to try this wicked fling. We found some cigarette papers and some dried corn silks and proceeded to roll our own cigarettes. It wasn’t easy, but we tingled with excitement at the thought of getting by with something. The cigarettes were poorly constructed, but we lit them and took a few puffs.

I don’t remember turning green, but I do remember being very ill. My mouth had this horrible taste. I gagged and wheezed—and vomited. End of adventure—except for the discipline I received later.

Sins have a way of reaching a very unpleasant end. We may think we have gotten by with some evil thought or deed, but beware! God sees and knows all. Be thankful that He will forgive if we repent.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** You know, Lord, as I know, that my sins corrupt my soul. Please forgive and cleanse my heart from evil thoughts as well as evil deeds. Amen.



## TEMPLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**SCRIPTURE:** Habakkuk 2:12-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him (Habakkuk 2:20, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Alleluia"

It was a close game. The Cincinnati Bengals were underdogs, having lost most of their earlier games. Now they played tough against the Denver Broncos and came within three points of victory. But the clock ran out with the final score Denver 15, Cincinnati 13.

After the game ended, the TV camera focused on a huddle on the playing field. Kneeling in prayer was a group of players from both teams with arms around each other. What a testimony!

The United States has become a nation of sports enthusiasts, or maybe sports worshipers. Has sports become our dominant religion? Do we idolize the sports heroes and teams to the extent that they literally become our objects of worship?

Thank God for football players who openly demonstrate their faith before the crowds! Thank God for sports heroes who speak of their faith in the Lord in interviews with the media! Indeed their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Lord is present in His holy temple! Today that is the Christian specifically and the church collectively. Let us honor Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Fill my life, Lord, with Your Holy Spirit, and may my every thought and deed exalt His Holy Name. Amen.

## TENDER MERCIES

**SCRIPTURE:** Habakkuk 3:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations (Psalm 89:1).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord”

I was coming down the escalator in a crowded department store during the “back to school” season, when I overheard the following conversation:

“No, you can’t buy that vest. It’s too expensive.”

“But all the girls at school are wearing them. You just don’t love me.”

“How ungrateful can you be? I just spent over two hundred dollars on school clothes for you, and you say I don’t love you because I don’t buy more!”

As I reached the ground floor and walked away from the argument, I thought how like spoiled children we sometimes are, insisting that God give us our own way.

In the midst of praying for God’s mercy, Habakkuk was reminded of the many mercies of God. As you ponder the many biblical examples of God’s mercy, dig into your own memory and make a list of special mercies that God has granted you, or find a hymnal and read the words of “Oh, Worship the King.” Robert Grant concludes this great hymn with these words: “Thy mercies how tender! How firm to the end! Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.” God’s mercies are everlasting!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Oh, Lord, my heart sings with the awareness of Your great love and mercies. May I be aware continually of Your goodness and provisions. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## IN THE NICK OF TIME

**SCRIPTURE:** Habakkuk 3:9-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior (Habakkuk 3:18, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Awesome God”

In the days of the “horse operas,” the story line often found the pioneers surrounded by warring Indians or bandits. When everything seemed hopeless; the trumpet sounded charge, and the U. S. Cavalry arrived just in time.

Comic books and movies used to show Superman or Batman coming to the rescue in the nick of time. People enjoy the defeat of evil and the triumph of good. The Saturday morning TV fare has kids in cartoons or the Power Rangers in the fight against evil.

Read the Bible. Read today’s text. When evil nations conquered or tortured God’s people, He came to the rescue in the nick of time. Sometimes His action came in the form of a miracle; sometimes a leader arose from the ranks to lead the fight to victory. Sometimes God sent another nation to effect His punishment.

One thing is sure: Evil will not win! Satan’s forces may win a battle, but God is still in control. The victory has already been won in Jesus Christ. He is our Super Hero. He defeated Satan at the cross. In Him we too will gain the victory, even when the battle seems to go against us. Right will win!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Praise God for His gracious mercy. Praise Him for His victory. Praise Him for saving us when all seemed lost in the battle against Satan. Amen.

## OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 46

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Matthew 1:23).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "A Mighty Fortress"

If a heathen enemy demanded the surrender of your town, what would you do? If you have the faith of a Hezekiah, you would not give answer until you consulted with God. But the answer might well be fundamentally different now from what it was then. Although God promised safety to Jerusalem and guaranteed it by destroying 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, it does not follow that He will do the same for us in similar circumstances. The reason is that we are subjects in a spiritual kingdom which obviously does not enjoy the same amount of physical protection as the theocratic monarchy in Israel. It is paradoxical that we can be held captive in the hands of materialistic men and yet be leaning safely on the everlasting arms. Our nation may some day be destroyed; but, thanks be to God, our kingdom is indestructible! And both of them are worth fighting for!

The key to Israel's safety is found in verses 7 and 11 of today's Psalm: "The Lord of hosts is with us." The key to our safety is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, Emmanuel, God with us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, our rock, we praise You for Your omnipotence. We rest assured that we are safe in You, for nothing can destroy You, and Your Word cannot be broken. Accept our thanksgiving in the name of Emmanuel. Amen.

## GOD LOOKS FOR LEADERS

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 22:23-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none (Ezekiel 22:30).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Rise Up, O Men of God"

The people of Israel had become impatient and rebellious and were on the verge of being destroyed. However, Moses interceded for them and offered to forfeit his life on their behalf, and God spared the nation (Exodus 32:31-24).

Moses represents the kind of leaders God wants. He wants men and women who stand for righteousness and put the welfare of the people ahead of their own interests and gains.

When God looks for such leaders and finds none, He is sorely disappointed and the whole society is in jeopardy.

What can we do to prevent this in our society?

We may pray that the right leaders will be appointed and the ones in office will obey God. We may use our best judgment and rely on God's guidance when deciding which candidates to support. We may also cast our vote and exercise our influence for the ones we find best qualified for the office. And that is not all. We may be a leader by standing for God and righteousness where we are.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Lord, for good leaders and the service they render to us. We are especially grateful for those who lead us in Christian worship and service. Help us to choose wise and godly leaders and to support and encourage them as they carry out their duties. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, we pray. Amen.

## My Prayer Notes

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# DEVOTIONS

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## October

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photo by Florence Sharp  
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**October 1**

## **HOW TO RECOGNIZE FALSE TEACHERS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Titus 1:10-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Ye shall know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:16).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Tell Me the Story of Jesus”

Jesus warned us against certified false teachers. They are on the scene in every generation. Such teachers are classified as wolves and mislead and ravage their followers. But we need not become their victims; Jesus also told us how to recognize them.

We may recognize them by what they teach and how they live. If their teachings and lives do not conform to the Bible and Jesus' example, they are false teachers.

Though we are to be aware of such teachers, we should not be suspicious and critical of all who instruct us in God's Word. Remember Apollos in Acts 18. He preached God's Word not fully knowing and understanding the gospel. Aquila and Priscilla did not condemn him but “. . . expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). Apollos was willing to receive instruction and to become an effective and outstanding preacher.

As Christians, we need only to study the Word of God to learn how to live close to Jesus. In this way, we will be able to discern false teachers.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord Jesus, send us wise and faithful teachers. Give us wisdom and spiritual discernment, lest we be deceived by false ones. Help us to live for You and to serve You so that our lives will send a clear signal and others will know that we are true Christians. Amen.

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October 1-6. **Herbert Lee** is semi-retired, having served in pastoral ministry for over thirty years. He and his wife, **Lola**, live in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.



## ARE WE UNGRATEFUL?

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 1:2-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** My people doth not consider (Isaiah 1:3).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Now Thank We All Our God"

The stench of dried fish announced that our convoy of trucks was approaching a foreign fishing village. It was a bleak winter day, and yet children rushed from their straw huts to cluster along the road. They were barefoot and partially or completely naked. They looked up at us in the military trucks, their sad faces begging for food.

It was then that I realized I had been taking America and her abundance for granted. I realized that I had spent my life expecting and wanting more than I had and that I had been ungrateful for blessings received.

We showered the cold and hungry children with candy bars and other ready-to-eat items from our rations. They hastily scooped them up, waved, and shouted their thanks to "Joe." Some of them even managed a smile in spite of their misery.

God continuously manifests His love and mercy upon us by showering us with compassion, protection, and daily bread. We receive His gifts. Do we appreciate or acknowledge them? Is it because we are ungrateful?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, forgive our ingratitude. Please continue to shower us with Your love and mercy, but teach us to appreciate and love You more. May we acknowledge that all the good we receive comes from You. Help us to express our gratitude in praise, adoration, and Christlike lives. Let us speak as the psalmist did, "In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust (Psalm 56:4). In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

October 3

## FOLLOW THE TRUE GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 5:7-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the present, to those who turn aside to follow gods (Psalm 40:40, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Am Resolved”

If someone asked, “Are you a worshiper of false gods,” how would you feel? Perhaps you would feel enraged and no doubt be quick to make denials.

The Bible makes a harsh statement about idolatry and false worship. According to God’s Word, it is to be uprooted without mercy. God punishes those who sin against Him.

The Israelites received gracious deliverance from the land of Egypt. Yet at times they allowed themselves to have too much confidence in their own strength, forsaking their trust in their Creator. God showed His anger toward their rebellious, unfaithful and ungodly behavior by disciplining them for their open unbelief. He said, “I will destroy you completely” (Jeremiah 5:18, *New International Version*).

Today we have been saved through the graciousness of God. He has given us salvation through His Son, Jesus.

Let us *not* be worshipers of false gods—let us trust the true and living God. Let us serve Him!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** We are grateful for a God of love and grace whose judgment is tempered with mercy. May we bow before You in reverence and praise Your holy name. We confess our sins and ask for restoration to Your fellowship. Strengthen and guide us, Lord, that we may resist temptation and restrain from sinning. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

## GOD'S EMBARGO

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 5:18-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Your sins have withholden good things from you (Jeremiah 5:25).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "We Plow the Fields"

The United Nations stand for world peace and the good of all nations. When nations violate UN rules and begin to threaten or harm other nations, the UN may take action.

They may censure offending nations or impose embargoes upon them, withholding food and supplies. The UN's action is intended to prevent nations from harming other nations or, in the outcome, themselves.

God has a purpose for nations, and His laws are the guidelines. Israel's mission, for instance, was to glorify God by keeping His laws and teaching them to other nations. When they were faithful to God and their mission, the nation prospered. When the people became stubborn and rebellious, God sometimes imposed embargoes upon them, so to speak, withholding the "good things" from them.

We readily and joyfully declare that God has prospered America and provided more than enough. But if we go after other gods and cast off God's moral code, as Israel had at the time of Jeremiah's writing, God may impose an embargo upon us. So, while the harvest is still bountiful, let us reverence God and abide by His laws, lest He withhold the "good things" we now enjoy.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, may our nation glorify You and fulfill its purpose. May Your goodness lead us to repentance, as the Bible teaches us. Help us to abide by Your laws, lest we bring harm upon ourselves and others. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

**October 5**

## **OUR HOPE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Hosea 13:4-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help (Hosea 13:9).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Hope of the World"

There may be times when it seems there is nothing nor no one who can help us. These are times when individuals and nations are more apt to turn to God and rely upon Him. Such had been Israel's experience in the wilderness. Likewise, many of us may remember personal or national crises during which we relied upon the Lord.

However, once crises pass and times and circumstances become favorable, we tend to forget God and cease to rely upon His help. By doing so we sow the seeds of our own destruction. We will also reap the harvest unless God intervenes.

I once attended a convention where, in the outcome, both sides of this matter were put in perspective. The first two speakers described the condition of the times and announced the inevitable destruction that would soon come. They seemed convinced there was no way out. Then another speaker took the platform. He also denounced our sins but declared that there is hope in Christ for all who will turn to Him.

Yes, there is hope, for individuals and the world, in Jesus.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Lord Jesus, for being with us in life's crises. Help us to serve You and rely upon You whether times are good or bad. We acknowledge that our ways lead to death and destruction and You are our only hope of Heaven and eternal life. Help us to realize that only in You do we have hope of life everlasting. Amen.

## TREATED BUT NOT HEALED

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 6:11-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “The Great Physician”

After an automobile accident, a man was taken to the emergency room, where he was treated for superficial injuries and released. Later that night, the man became concerned about his injuries and returned to the hospital. Again he was treated and released. He returned home and died before daybreak. The doctors had failed to discover and treat his most serious injury.

Let us beware lest that should become our spiritual plight. There are spiritual doctors, like the priests and prophets in today’s Scripture reading, who may not correctly diagnose our case nor prescribe the right medication. We also tend to rely on self remedies for spiritual and moral ailments. Such measures may soothe the conscience and reduce embarrassment, but they treat only the symptoms and leave the deadly cause intact.

However, we need not rely on incompetent spiritual doctors and self remedies. We may go directly to Jesus, the Great Physician. He will make a correct diagnose and prescribe the right medication. The medicine may be the bitter pill of repentance, but it’s effective. The cure is sure for all who follow the Physician’s orders.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, thank You for spiritual cleansing and healing. We realize that they are possible and available only through You and Your shed blood. May we not attempt to cover up our sins but to confess them and receive Your forgiveness and peace. Amen.

October 7

## LISTEN CLOSELY

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 23:16-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** If they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds (Jeremiah 23:22, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “In the Garden”

“You’re not listening to me,” the frustrated dad said. His youngest daughter, preoccupied with her dolls, was not paying attention to his instructions about the family plans. When he mentioned the youth group roller-skating party, he suddenly had her full attention.

From time to time, the Bible speaks of the Lord’s frustration with the false prophets of Israel. Interested in other things, they neglected to impart the words of the Lord to Israel. They promoted their own agendas and thoughts instead.

Preoccupied with entertaining ourselves, we sometimes miss God’s words to us. We find it more self-satisfying to promote our own ideas instead of the Lord’s words. This displeases Him, and we find ourselves feeling His wrath rather than His blessing.

Today, remember God’s wants our attention. He wants us to hear Him. So listen. He may be inviting us to a party to celebrate His love for us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, forgive me for the times I have been too preoccupied to hear Your words. I long to be a vessel through which Your words flow perfectly. Your guidance gives me hope, and offers hope for others as I share it with them. In the name of Jesus, amen.

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October 7-13, **Greg Swinney** serves as campus minister with Christian Student Fellowship at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He and his wife, Laurie, have two children, Beth and Nathan.

## SHOPPING FOR A GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 13:1-5

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere (Deuteronomy 13:4, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "To God Be the Glory"

"Psychic Friends Support Group is seeking new members interested in reaching fullest potential as spiritual beings. Meet at the student union of the university, Tuesday evenings," the advertisement read. Sandy grew up in a solid Christian home, but curiosity got the best of her and she found herself peeking around the door of the downstairs room at the student union.

One of the group said, "Joe got a job just as I said he would. I foresaw it in this crystal." Sandy's mouth dropped open. The crystal was pretty to look at, but not powerful enough to get a job for Joe. Sandy knew it was time to leave.

God's Word to the people of Israel cautioned them about this type of situation years before Sandy tiptoed into the student union. If a prophet correctly foretold a happening and then urged them to worship other gods, he was false.

The Lord's words of caution ring out loud and clear for us: listen to Him for daily direction for our lives. And, when He answers our prayers, we give Him the glory for great things He has done.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father in Heaven, so many voices beg for my allegiance. Help me not to be led astray by their tempting promises of prosperity and success. You alone, O Lord, are the lifter of my head and the source of my strength. You alone, O Lord, can give me salvation. You alone sent Your Son as my Lord and Savior. In His name I pray. Amen.

October 9

## **PREDICTIONS, PREDICTIONS PREDICTIONS!**

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 18:15-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow"

The tabloid newspapers are great at making headlines to get our attention. Every so often an issue boasts about predictions sure to come true within a year. They include predictions that are shocking, others that are funny, and a few that make sense.

Some of these predictions do come true. Now what? Are these tabloid fortune tellers legitimate?

God's people of Israel faced this same question. "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" they asked. God said if a prophecy did not come true, then the prophet was false. One hundred percent accuracy was the test. The New Testament urges us to test the spirits, to see whether they are of God. That's good advice.

Make no mistake about it, God's Word is always true. He has never been wrong. In Him, we can know that we are safe. We can trust Him all the time. When we are feeling uncertain about the future, we can rest assured that He holds the future and He holds our hand. Today we live in confidence.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, I realize You are all powerful and all knowing. Your ways are higher than our ways. Today I renew my trust in You and place my hand in Yours. Help me to walk with You faithfully now, and in the days ahead. In the name of Your Son, Jesus, amen.



## TURN DOWN THAT RACKET

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 29:3-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1 Timothy 2:1, 2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling”

“Turn down that racket,” Justin heard from the hallway. His stereo was too loud to suit his mother. Justin respected his mother’s wishes and leaned over to twist the knob.

Jeremiah prophesied to a captive audience—literally! Some of God’s people were captives in Babylon. Should they become terrorists, trying to break free? False prophets made matters worse by saying they would soon be free. Indeed, they were making quite a racket.

The Lord used those tough times to teach important lessons. He wanted His people to accept the punishment they deserved. “Seek peace and prosperity, pray for your captors,” He said. They needed to learn about submission rather than freedom.

Finding yourself in a tough time? Maybe you are captive to some circumstances that stretch your patience. The Lord wants you to respond in prayer, submitting to His divine plan. Then and only then will you find the prosperity God alone gives.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, I praise You for Your infinite wisdom. Thank You for allowing circumstances to happen in my life to bring about my maturity and Christlikeness. Forgive me for the times I make noise by complaining about things. Help me to be quiet and learn the lessons You teach. In the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

October 11

## PUT AWAY THE PLAY-DOH



**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 29:10-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Seek Ye First"

Faith in the Lord gets twisted sometimes. Like Play-Doh out of the can, we mold it into shapes of our own imagination. If we like what we have made we keep it a while; if we aren't happy with the finished work, we squash it and start again.

For some, faith is a Sunday morning jaunt to a church service. Others have faith that views God as an Aladdin's lamp giving them whatever they wish. Some people have a faith that means occasional times of prayer only in desperate situations.

God sent Jeremiah to explain true faith to His children. "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." God was weary of being just a passing fancy or a leisure time activity in the lives of His people. He wanted their full devotion.

Freedom would never come until Israel sought the Lord with all their heart. So it is with us. Let's put our Play-Doh faith back in the can and seek Him with all our hearts. He will not disappoint us with the finished product. We'll see Him face to face.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Eternal Father in Heaven, You are worthy of all my love. For the times I haven't been very serious about my faith, please forgive me. I long to be a dedicated disciple, seeking You with all my heart. Teach me Your way, O God. Lead me to a life of fulfillment in You. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

## CONVENIENT OBEDIENCE

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 29:15-19

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock (*Matthew 7:24, New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Trust and Obey”

Jesus had a lot of patience with the people of His day. No matter how hard He tried to get the message through, some hearers didn't seem to get it. He told them exactly what to do, but many went their own way.

One day, Jesus told about two men building houses. One was foolish and the other one was wise. The wise one whose house stood strong in the storm was the one who acted obediently. The foolish man ended up soaking wet.

Jesus' patience with His disciples reflects the patience of God with His people in the Old Testament. “For they have not listened to my words,” declares the Lord, “words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets.” The sin of disobedience has diseased mankind for centuries. Jesus and Jeremiah both gave the prescription—obedience.

We can choose wisely. Today, let us try to be obedient in everything. Let's realize God's Words to us are not only for our *information*, they are for our *transformation*. Let's not foolishly forget the Lord's commands, but wisely obey with all our hearts.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, thank You for not giving up on me when I haven't listened to You. Your Words are so uplifting, so encouraging, and so practical. They are just what I need. Forgive me for my foolishness. Help me to be wise. I trust Your promise to make my house stand firm in the storm. Let my desire be to follow Your ways. In the name of Jesus Christ my Lord, I pray. Amen.

October 13

## OLD LIES, NEW LIES

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 29:20-32

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Onward, Christian Soldiers"

"New Age is all the rage," read the bumper sticker on the car ahead. Everywhere from Hollywood to bumper stickers, we are bombarded with this new way of thought. Its message is clear. All of us can become gods and goddesses in a new era of enlightenment

Shemaiah, a false prophet in Jeremiah's time, could have been driving the car with the new age bumper sticker. As if he were God, he told the people his own opinions and thoughts. God's people paid a high price for believing the lies. They were captives, prisoners in a foreign land.

Satan's strategies haven't changed much. He used lies with God's people in Old Testament times, and he uses them today. Even his lie has not changed. They ring with the same words. "You can be gods," he tempts.

Jesus, who came to be the way, the truth, and the life, told us that the truth can make us free. The devil's lies may imprison us, but Jesus' truth is the key that unlocks prison doors and sets us forever free.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty God, Your perfect truth is eternal. Your Words set me free. Grant me discernment, Lord. Help me to be aware of the devil's lies and to combat his attacks with Your truth. You alone are God. You alone are worthy of my praise. Thank You for the salvation I have through Your Son Jesus. Amen.

## WHAT COLOR IS GOD'S GLORY?

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 1:22-28

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking (Ezekiel 1:28, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "To God Be the Glory"

We were on the way home from the park when we saw it—a double rainbow! It appeared when the sun began to break through some of the darkest clouds in the sky. Every face in the car was turned toward a window to get a better look at this beautiful sight. We finally pulled off the interstate, took a picture, and talked about God's promise of the rainbow. The children still remember that special day.

I love rainbows. Two rooms in our home display designs of this special handiwork of God. They remind me of God's faithfulness. Ezekiel describes God's glory as like a rainbow. His description includes the clouds of a rainy day. Do you suppose he needed to be reminded of God's faithfulness as he faced the challenging job ahead of him? Notice what Ezekiel did when he saw the rainbow.

I am thankful that God's glory is seen in many forms. The rainbow reveals God to us. When we see a rainbow, let's take time to worship the God who made it!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, thank You for placing rainbows in the sky to remind us of Your glory. Thank You for showing Your faithfulness in every challenge of life we face. We bow down before You and seek Your guidance in our tasks today. In the faithful name of Jesus we pray, amen.

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October 14-20. **Pam Eubanks** and her husband, Bryan, minister with the Deaf Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio.

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF WARNING

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 3:12-21

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ (Colossians 1:28, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Rescue the Perishing"

Warnings are everywhere. They are on medicine labels, food labels, and clothing labels. Signs are on highways, gates, and doors. People see them at the beginning of movies, at the end of roads, on the outside of boxes, on the inside of books. Why are they there? For protection, care, caution, restriction, or instruction. The labels help people to know the consequences of their choices.

In today's Scripture, God gave Ezekiel a risky, yet important, role. He was to warn the house of Israel with the words of God. His responsibility was not to force them to change for God. He was to warn them of what would happen if they didn't obey God. There was good news and bad news. The bad news: he had to warn Israel. The good news: he was not responsible for their choices after he carried out his job.

We have the responsibility to admonish and teach those whom God places in our charge. We must do our job in the best way we can. Then we have to let go. We have to let God's Word do its work in the lives of our children, students, spouses, friends, neighbors, and fellow-workers.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, we are aware of Your awesome power. Please give us Your wisdom as we admonish and teach others. May they see the protection and peace that come in obeying You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## PLANNING ON GOD'S TIMING

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 3:22-27

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue (Proverbs 16:1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Take My Life and Let it Be"

What had been on Ezekiel's agenda for the day we read about in chapter three? What kinds of things did he have written on his "TO DO" list in his daily planner? Did any of them get accomplished? We may never know the answers to those questions. What we do know is this: God had a plan. He knew what he wanted done, when and how it would be accomplished, and by whom. Ezekiel chose to follow God's wisdom and instructions, whether they changed his own plans or not. He accepted God's timing!

Proverbs 16:1 is a helpful Scripture. It points out our responsibility and God's responsibility. It is comforting to know God wants people to make plans. It also frees us when we trust Him for the timing and guidance of our tongues. That is, of course, if we allow Him to work from His game plan.

How often do our warnings go unheeded because we do not wait for God's timing? Maybe we could use a little more peanut butter to keep our tongues in check until God is ready to use them . . . with His words . . . and His tone of voice . . . in His time.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord God Almighty, we praise You for Your ability to cause things to happen at the right time. Help us to look for Your guidance in our plans today. May the plans of our hearts bring You glory. In Christ, amen.

October 17

## GOD'S IDEA OF "R & R"

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 20:1-13

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul (Psalm 19:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Just When I Need Him Most"

Stress and burnout find their way into conversations, books and lectures these days. Christians seem to have an overload of stress and burnout-related problems. Today's Scripture contains the core problem and the solution!

Idols are not in the decor of most Christian homes, at least not in the form of a golden calf. This might be a good time, though, to evaluate what we choose for "R & R"—rest and relaxation. Everyone needs times of rest. God instructed us to rest. He even told Ezekiel He was disappointed that the people did not pay attention to His Sabbaths. They were designed to help the people rest from their work and celebrate God's faithfulness to them.

Do we choose family times of fun not only to rest from working, but also to help us remember God's faithfulness? Or do we try to get rid of stress in ways the world suggests? Some of the world's suggestions are good, but they may not help us remember God's faithfulness. They distract, rather than sharpen, our focus. God's idea of "R & R" seems to be "rest & remember." What are your plans for this weekend?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father in Heaven, we praise You for making us. Thank You for knowing what gives us full, happy and fulfilled lives. Guide us into restful times of remembering Your faithfulness this weekend. In Jesus' refreshing name, amen.



## WHAT'S IN A NAME

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 20:18-24

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psalm 23:3, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Blessed Be the Name"

We were sitting in the family room of our home, having just returned from the credit union where my father works. My dad had just co-signed with me on my first loan for my first car. It was an important day for learning important lessons.

As our conversation began in the family room, my dad told me to be faithful in making the monthly payments. He asked me to let him know if I couldn't make a payment. He wasn't just being generous. He explained that he had worked many years building up a name with good credit. How I paid on my loan would reflect on his name, as well as mine. He was willing to help me for his name's sake.

God controlled His anger against the Israelites for His name's sake. The Bible states, "I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen," (Ezekiel 20:22).

Strong's concordance lists 29 references to what may be done for the sake of God's name. In a "me first" society, Christians have a twofold lesson to learn and teach: 1) reflect on God's actions "for His name's sake"; 2) evaluate the Christian's actions "for God's name's sake."

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, we praise Your name. Thank You for the guidance and benefits we have known because You have protected Your name. Help us to make choices that praise and protect Your holy name. In the powerful name of Jesus, amen.

## WHERE ARE YOUR EYES?

**SCRIPTURE:** Micah 7:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”

What was your week like? What were the “newsbreaking stories” on the T.V.? What did the papers report? Was there any good news? If the answer is yes, praise the Lord! If it was all bad, you won’t have trouble identifying with Micah in today’s Scripture.

Micah surveyed the circumstances of his day. They looked very depressing. He had a choice of keeping his eyes on the bad or shifting his view to the Lord. He chose to watch in hope for God.

Our three-year-old, Maleah, doesn’t like to be in a room by herself very long. When she finds herself in that situation, she begins shouting, “Mommy! Where are you?” I answer, “In here.” She then says, “But I don’t see you.” I tell her where I am. She searches until she finds me. Then she comes running into the room, jumps in my arms, and gives me a big hug.

When our daily circumstances begin to look gloomy and hopeless, we need to start searching for God. We need to watch in hope for the one who holds all things together.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** We praise You, God, for always being there. Thank You for promising to be with us. Thank You for sending Emmanuel—“God with us.” Thank You for hearing us when we cry out to You. Thank You for the hope You give, which will never disappoint. In the uplifting name of Jesus, amen.

## JESUS IS AMAZING!

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 13:53-58

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this! (Mark 2:12, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “My Saviour’s Love”

Jesus walked through His three-year earthly ministry doing good. People recognized His teaching as having authority. They could tell there was something different about Him. “Amazed” sometimes is used in the Bible to describe the people’s initial reaction to Jesus. The actions that followed were different in different people.

Some people ran to bring others to meet Jesus. Sometimes the apostles were confused. Others felt threatened and began scoffing at Him. The people in Nazareth were amazed at His teaching, but Matthew 13:57 says they took offense at Him. Because they did not believe in Him, Jesus did not do many miracles in that town.

Jesus is amazing! His Word has amazing power. His spirit can do amazing things within those who trust Him. His amazing power can build our faith and “do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20, *New International Version*). It depends on where we allow our amazement to lead us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, we stand amazed in Your presence. We thank You for Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for showing Your amazing power in His life. Thank You for using that same power to accomplish Your will in our lives. Help us to always look to You for assurance. In Christ Jesus, amen.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 33: 1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me (Ezekiel 33:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Bring Them In”

Sometimes as I watch children, teenagers, or even adults, I notice that when something bad happens—a window gets broken or a person gets hurt—everyone says, “It wasn’t my fault. It was his fault.” In our Scripture reading God is explaining who is at fault in some cases.

A watchman might be called a guard today. When he sees enemies coming, he must warn the people so they can get together and defend themselves. He is responsible for giving the warning. If he warns his people and they do nothing, and the enemies come and kill them, the watchman is not responsible for that. He has done his part. The person who was warned and did nothing is at fault.

On the other hand, if the watchman sees the danger and does not give the warning and the people are killed, he is guilty for their death.

Physical danger is one problem, but being prepared spiritually is even more important. Ezekiel was instructed to be a guard for the people and warn them about wicked living—about disobeying God. Who would be God’s watchman today? Would you?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, thank You for the watchmen who give us the warning about the wages of sin—death. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## DO RIGHT AND LIVE

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 33:10-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord is. . . not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Amazing Grace”

The Israelites wanted to do what the heathen people around them were doing, even though those practices were not pleasing to God. Therefore the Israelites were overwhelmed by their own sins and offenses.

Someone has said, “If you are always wanting things you shouldn’t have—change your want list.” Set your own pattern of desires and activities. Don’t let others plan your life, but follow God’s plan.

God’s advice to us, when we are doing wrong things, is to repent. We must accept the responsibility for what we do, turn around, stop doing bad things, and do what is right. The unrighteous man will live when he turns from wrong ways and does what is right in the sight of God.

The righteous man who stops doing good and begins doing evil will lose his life. Doing right is a lifetime commitment.

Sometimes we may do a bad thing, such as lie or cheat. Then it is hard to tell the truth and suffer the embarrassment and punishment for the wrong. But God says the people who turn around and get things right will be saved. We need to be right with God.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for His love, that He does not want the wicked to perish, and that He makes it possible for us to be restored to Him and be in His kingdom.

October 23

## MORE THAN FAIR

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 33:17-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever (Psalm 107:1).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"

When Jimmy was four years old, he was disciplined for throwing stones at a neighbor's cat. "It's not fair," he protested tearfully. "Billy did it first."

When Jimmy was seventeen, he was fined for driving too fast. Again he said, "It's not fair. Some other people were driving faster than I was."

About 850 years after Israel came out of Egypt to become an independent nation, some of its people were taken to Babylon as captives. God said it was their punishment because they had been doing wrong. "It's not fair," they grumbled. "The Babylonians who captured us are worse than we are."

Really it was fair for Jimmy to be disciplined, and later to be fined. It was fair for the people of Israel to be made captives. They had done wrong, and they deserved to be punished. It was not fair for them to say that God was not fair.

To Christians God is much more than fair. He is loving and forgiving. All of us have done wrong; but when we obey Him and do our very best to follow Jesus, God takes away all our wrongdoing and lets us live forever in Heaven.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for loving us and forgiving us. Think of any wrong you have done this week, and ask Him to forgive you for that sin. Promise to try very hard to do nothing but right today, and tomorrow, and all the rest of your life.

## WORTH IT ALL

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 18:17-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning, my God turns my darkness into light (Psalm 18:28, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “When We See Christ”

Is it possible to do good always? Well, actually only Jesus lived a life without sin. But one thing that makes righteous living easier is to develop good habits. Reading the Bible and praying daily, attending church and associating with Christian friends—all these help us to please God with our lives.

Is it possible to be kind when others criticize? Yes, because God’s Spirit helps us. We may be hurt or offended, but God will take care of us if we do right even when others do wrong.

In the psalm we have read, David says God helps him because He is pleased with him. He has done good things, he has kept his life clean. He knows God’s Word and he has not turned away from God. This does not mean that David never sinned; but when he sinned, he repented and returned to be God’s servant. He did not continue in sinful ways. He was called a man after God’s own heart. In his psalms he encouraged us to be pure in heart.

Jesus also taught us that the pure in heart will be blessed or happy. The Bible states, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God,” (Matthew 5:8). It isn’t easy, but it’s worth it.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for helping us grow by allowing us to have trials, and for being there to carry us through when we would give up. Pray that He will give us strength for our weaknesses.

## GOD IS ABLE

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 3

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Trusting Jesus"

A man and his wife were missionaries among hostile people. One day their house was surrounded by warriors. There was nothing they could do but pray. They prayed all night. In the morning the warriors were gone. Some time later the tribal chief became a Christian. The missionary asked, "Why did your warriors leave us without harming us when they had surrounded us?" The chief replied, "I want to ask you, where did all those soldiers in shining armor with spears come from?" The missionaries had not seen the soldiers, but God had caused the tribal warriors to see them.

I love the Twenty-third Psalm. David says God prepares a table before him in the presence of his enemies and anoints his head with oil. I imagine David hungry and facing an enemy army. So God sets a meal before him. Can you picture David sweaty and dusty, with his hair messed up? God puts oil on his head, combs his hair, and comforts him. There is no rush caused by the enemy. God is taking care of David. He fills his cup to overflowing.

We need to see God providing protection, strength, and help beyond our needs. He is able to do this.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God that He is able and that He cares for His people; that He enables us to have peace in the presence of turmoil. Pray that we may rely on Him and trust Him to take care of us in spite of our enemies.



## THE MERCY OF GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 18: 21-28

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming (Mark 13:35, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Jesus, I Come”

Can God forgive a liar, if he repents and stops lying and speaks the truth? Can God forgive unfaithfulness in marriage, if one repents and returns to faithfulness? Could God forgive Judas? Can He forgive a drug dealer? a murderer? Can we decide the extent of God’s mercy?

God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. He is pleased when they return from their wickedness, do right, and seek His salvation.

You remember the story Jesus told about a son who took his inheritance, left home, and wasted it in wicked living. When he considered his wickedness and his destitute condition, he finally decided to return to his father. He did not expect to be treated like a son, but like a hired servant, just to be back in the security of his father’s household. Did his father take him back as a servant? NO. He received him with joy, restored him as a son, and had a big party. There is rejoicing in Heaven in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).

We need to be faithful in our worship and adoration of Christ, always watching for ways to spread the good news.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for His everlasting lovingkindness and for accepting sinners when they turn from their sins and seek Him with all their hearts. Pray that we will be alert, continually looking for His return.

October 27

## TAKING THE TEST

**SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 6:1-5

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him ( Colossians 3:17, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Reach Out to Your Neighbor"

A person must not think he is more important than others. When we compare ourselves to other people, we are using the wrong measuring stick. The Bible gives us the true measuring stick. It is the life of Jesus. When we look to His example, we find a satisfying way in which to live here on earth.

Sometimes we ask a friend or a teacher how we are doing. That may be all right, but we can read the Bible and check ourselves according to it. The New Testament gives basic guidance for followers of Jesus, and we can ask God for strength and guidance to measure up to His standard. God will help us to carry our own load and also to help others.

Do we lack the fruit of the Spirit, as Paul described it in Galatians 5:22, 23? God can renew our fruit from His abundant supply if we follow His leading. Depend on God to fill you with love for the unlovely, joy for days of despair, peace for turmoil, patience with annoyances, kindness for hurts, goodness toward all, faithfulness when others are unfaithful, gentleness instead of brutality, and self-control when tested beyond your normal limit.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank God for His unique Word, that helps us set goals in our Christian life. Pray for His help to think highly of others and humbly of ourselves, and to glorify Christ each day.

## SPLITTING HAIRS

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 5:1-4

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness (Psalm 9:8).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"

It is said that a skilled writer once used a microscope and fine pen to print Lincoln's entire Gettysburg Address on a human hair less than three inches long.

God used more hair to give a greater message. The hair from Ezekeiel's head and beard was an object lesson to proclaim God's judgment on His chosen people.

God is holy; He hates sin. He is just; He condemns sin. He is sovereign; He punishes sin. But, He is also gracious, compassionate, and loving; He forgives sin.

As He would restore Israel again, so will He continue to love and pardon His children who come to Him in repentance when we have disobeyed and rebelled.

God told Ezekiel to weigh his hair. God's judgment is always accurate. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne, love and faithfulness go before you" (Psalm 89:14, *New International Version*).

God's justice is consistent with His love. It is because God loves that He is just. The balance of love and justice makes His acts of love and justice meaningful.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, we thank You for Your love and mercy. You love us even when we fail and are undeserving of Your love. Help us to walk worthy of Your grace. We pray this prayer today in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## LOVE CAN HURT

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 5:5-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord disciplines those he loves, and punishes everyone he accepts as a son (Hebrews 12:6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Children of the Heavenly King”

Friends of mine had a son who caused them a lot of heart-break. He began to use alcohol and drugs.

The parents loved the son deeply, and tolerated his behavior for a long time. But one day they found him and a friend using drugs in their home. Their hearts were heavy, but they knew they had to punish him.

With tears running down their cheeks, they told me the hardest thing they ever did was to tell the son he would have to leave their home. They said, “We love you! When you can get professional help and change your lifestyle, come home to love, and open arms.”

God grieved when He had to punish His people. Jerusalem was the recipient of His Word, the dwelling place of His glory and the object of His love. However, instead of honoring God she rebelled against Him.

As God’s children we know that “no discipline seems pleasant at the time . . . later on it produces . . . righteousness and peace (Hebrews 12:11, *New International Version*). Anything God does is for our good.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Our Father, teach us to recognize that Your discipline is proof of Your love. Thank You for loving us as true sons. May we understand that Your chastisement is to make us more like You. In the name of our Savior we pray. Amen.

## WHEN GOD SPEAKS ✓

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 5:13-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; . . . I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 12:25).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O Word of God Incarnate"

Pictured on a plaque hanging on my kitchen wall are three small ducks standing before a larger duck. Across the top of the picture are the words: "Because I am the mother—that's why!"

God speaks with absolute authority. He means what He says and says what He means. He warned Israel of coming judgment caused by their disobedience and rebellion. Three times in today's Scripture He says, "I, the Lord, have spoken" (vv. 13, 15, 17).

The Israelites endured great humility and suffering because they willfully disobeyed. God's children could escape many heartaches and troubles if we would listen and obey God when He speaks through His Word.

A father wanted his boy to do certain things for him. He told his son simply how to do them. "Now do you understand?" asked the father. He was surprised when the son said, "No!" "Why not?" asked the father. "Because I don't want to," said the boy.

The main reason why we do not listen and obey God when He speaks is that we don't want to!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, help us to say as Samuel did, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." May we always want to obey You because we love You. Amen.

**October 31**

## **NO OTHER GOD**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 6:1-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol (Exodus 20:3, 4, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Whiter Than Snow"

The northwest coast of Maui, Hawaii, is a mountainous area high above the ocean. It is breathtakingly beautiful. However, its natural loviness is marred by many piles of three rocks stacked by human hands. I asked an islander about these. He answered, "They are idols."

Our Lord wants first place in our hearts. Anyone or anything that takes His place is an idol. It may be a beautiful house, expensive furniture, a car, a boat, or whatever takes first place in our hearts and minds. We can idolize our mates, dates, or children. There is nothing wrong or sinful in possessing things. It is only when they possess us that they become idols.

God warned the Israelites that He would destroy their idols. He wanted to be their only God, even as He desires to be ours. He promised them, "Ye shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 6:7, 10). The idols would be destroyed, but God is eternal.

John wrote, "Dear children, keep yourself from idols" (1 John 5:21, *New International Version*).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** "The dearest idol I have known, whatever it may be, help me to tear it from Thy throne, and worship only Thee."

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# DEVOTIONS

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## November

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photo by Florence Sharp

**November 1**

## **OBEDIENCE IS LOVE IN ACTION**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 6:11-14

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** If you love me, you will obey what I command (John 14:15, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “All Authority and Power”

A young boy lived with his grandfather in the Swiss Alps. Often, just to hear the sound of his own voice echoing back to him, he would go outside and shout, “Hello.” Then he would call out, “I love you . . . I love you.”

One day the boy seriously misbehaved, and his grandfather disciplined him severely. Reacting angrily, the child shook his fist and screamed, “I hate you!” He was startled when the rocks across the valley responded in kind: “I hate you . . . I hate you . . . I hate you.” So it is in life. Call it one of the laws of human existence. We get back what we give.

In a sense, when the Israelites refused to obey God’s commands, they were saying, “I hate you,” to God. We may deny it with our mouths, but when we continue to commit sin and rebel against God’s will, we are saying by our actions, “I hate you, God.” Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15, *New International Version*).

Obedience to God is the most infallible evidence of sincere and supreme love to Him. Let us show our love by obedience to our Father in Heaven.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Father I pray that my love for You will manifest itself by my complete obedience to You. Help me to know You through the peace and joy of obedience, not through Your discipline because of my disobedience. I want to live in Your wisdom and love. In the name of Jesus Christ my Lord, I pray. Amen.



## **PUNISHMENT FITS THE CRIME**

**SCRIPTURE:** Hosea 9:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality (Colossians 3:25, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Have You Counted the Cost?"

"Let the punishment fit the crime." Lawmakers have used that method for a long time. God used it in His judgment on the Israelites. Israel had become defiled by her sin. How appropriate, then, that she eat defiled food in defiled lands. In exile, the people would lose the opportunity to worship as God had instructed them. They had corrupted their worship by their sin and hypocrisy. Now they would be denied the privilege of worship. The consequences of their wrong doing was great.

Parents use this method of discipline. When a child abuses a privilege, that privilege is denied. The Israelites had chosen the worldly life of the people around them. Now their captors would keep them in bondage to that same sinful lifestyle. Sin holds us in captivity.

During the years in exile, how often they must have cried, "If only!" Their homes, possessions, and families were lost along with their freedom and right to worship the true and living God. The day of retribution for their sins had come. Let us not wait until it's too late to obey God. Is sin worth the consequences?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, may we always seek to live the way Your children should. Thank You for the victory that we can have over sin through Christ Jesus. We praise You for Your Word that we can use as a sword against Satan and his attempts to cause us to sin. Thank You that we have forgiveness of our sins through Christ Jesus. Amen.

November 3

## ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

**SCRIPTURE:** Hosea 9: 10-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever (Psalm 103:9, *New King James Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Unworthy"

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." Still I can't think of anything more heartbreaking than to lose the love of someone dear to you, but we can lose the love of those we hold dear when we hurt them with our words and actions.

God loved His children Israel with an everlasting love, but their infidelity and sin had broken His heart. He had showered His blessings upon them, pleaded with them to return to Him, but they had ignored His love. He said, "Enough is enough."

Hosea said, "My God will reject them because they have not obeyed Him" (Hosea 9:17, *New International Version*). Israel had seventy years in exile to look back and reflect on God's goodness to them. It may have seemed that His love had ended, but when some of them again loved and obeyed Him, they found that He loved them still.

Let us recognize and appreciate the goodness of God and our earthly loved ones now. That is better than to live a lifetime of regret and sorrow.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, I try daily to show You by my actions how much I love You. May I never take Your love and grace for granted. Thank You for Your unfailing love and patience with me. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

## PAYDAY SOMEDAY

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 24:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord . . . sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by His servants the prophets (2 Kings 24:2).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim"

Charlie Brown built a castle in the sand, but even as he admired his work, a sudden downpour leveled it. Standing before the smooth place that was left, he said, "There must be a lesson here, but I don't know what it is."

More easily we find some lessons in this dark page in Judah's history. One is that payday will come someday. Manasseh's detestable sins had been continued by others in Jerusalem. Now was the time of punishment.

A clear lesson of the Bible is that sin will be punished. God had patiently provided time to repent. He had sent His servants, the prophets, with warnings of the consequences if repentance did not occur. Now it was too late. Time on the clock of God's patience had run out.

A positive lesson we can learn from this bleak record is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, open our eyes to see that Your promises and warnings are for our good. Help us to listen well and heed what You have said to us. Guide us this day to be responsive to Your will as revealed through Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

**November 5**

## **NAME NAMES!**

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 24:8-19

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** A good name is to be more desired than great riches (Proverbs 22:1, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Blessed Be the Name"

"Name names!" the editor shouted to his young reporters. "No story is complete without the name of everyone involved." One reporter filed the following story:

Three farms were afflicted by the lightning storm Thursday night. Mr. and Mrs. Alva Todd reported a fire in their barn. Michael Arlington said several trees were knocked down. Fred Morse reported that three of his cows were struck by lightning. Their names were Bessie, Gilda, and Plug.

The names of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin both mean, "God sets up or establishes." Mattaniah, Jehoiakim's brother's name, means, "Gift of God." His name was changed to Zedekiah, meaning, "God is righteous." In spite of their names, these men "did evil in the sight of the Lord." Oh, that these ancient rulers would have lived up to their names! Judgment could have been averted, and God's blessings would have been abundant.

We are called Christians. Are we living up to that designation? Are we truly representing the Christ whose name we wear?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father in Heaven, help us to consider the privilege as well as the responsibility of wearing the name Christian. Please forgive us when we have brought reproach on Your name. In the name of Your Son we pray, amen.

## **SOMETHING GREATER THAN THE TEMPLE**

**SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 25:13-17**

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here (Matthew 12:6, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee”

The splendor of the temple was unequaled. Including the capitals on their tops, the bronze pillars were more than 30 feet high. The Chaldeans from Babylon broke them in pieces small enough to be carried to their country on camels or donkeys. The inside of the temple was lined with gold that now would be worth many millions of dollars. The Chaldeans took that too. As a result of disobedience and rebellion, the glory of the temple was gone. Its precious metals were carried away to a foreign land.

The Scriptures warned about the foolishness of trusting in riches rather than in God, but the people of Jerusalem had not learned this important lesson.

Several hundred years after this event, Jesus told a group of critical Pharisees that He was greater than the temple. Certainly our relationship with Jesus Christ is far more significant than anything here on earth. The temple was transitory; Jesus is eternal. The temple was made by man; Jesus is divine. The temple was a place where God was worshiped; Jesus is worthy to receive our wholehearted devotion and worship. He is greater than all. Let's worship and praise Him!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Lord, help us to find value in those things that You deem valuable. There is so much in our world that distracts us. Help us to cultivate our precious relationship with You through Your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

**November 7**

## **GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 25:18-24

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** So Judah was led away into exile from its land (2 Kings 25:21, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Through It All"

My wife works for the state in one of its prisons. She interviews the inmates and helps classify them as to where they will serve their time. When possible, she offers a few words of encouragement. She tries to get the prisoners to face the fact of why they are imprisoned and to make the best of their time while incarcerated by trying to better themselves for when they get their freedom back.

What were the people of Judah thinking as they were taken into exile from their land? Even while they were in captivity God provided His Word to them through His servants, the prophets. It was time to face up to the fact that they were being punished for their sin and rebellion against a Holy God. It was time to take the medicine and learn some hard lessons.

God was not finished with these people, but now they needed a heavy dose of discipline. We will all do well to heed the counsel of Hebrews 12:5, 6: "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord . . . for those whom the Lord loves he disciplines."

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, we know that there are times when You must discipline Your children. Help us to welcome that discipline knowing that we shall be stronger in our relationship with You. Give us wisdom to see what You are teaching us through that discipline. Let us see Your love all around us. In the name of Jesus, our Savior, we pray. Amen.

## IS THERE ANY HOPE?

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 25:25-30

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Though He slay me, I will hope in Him (Job 13:15, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “The Solid Rock”

Years ago, a submarine was rammed by a ship off the coast of Massachusetts. It sank immediately. The crew was trapped in a prison-house of death. How could they be rescued? After days of frantic planning, a diver near the sunken vessel heard a tapping from inside. He recognized it as Morse code. The question was being tapped out slowly: “Is . . . there . . . any . . . hope?”

The Israelites that were trapped in Babylonian captivity, far from their own homeland, may have wondered if all hope was gone. If they listened to the ‘prophets’ message they were encouraged to think the captivity would indeed come to an end. They may also have had their hope rekindled when King Jehoiachin was released from prison and given special favors. This seemed to be an indication of better things to come. The future now looked a great deal brighter.

Let’s keep our hope in Jesus Christ alive—whatever the circumstances! Someone once said that man can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only for one second without hope. We have hope for today, tomorrow and eternity.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear God, keep alive within us hope and trust in Your Word. Help us to remember that You keep Your promises. Thank You for the living hope we have because of Your Son. Amen.

**November 9**

## **EVEN WHEN HE IS SILENT!**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 74:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22, 23, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

An unknown Jewish refugee in war-torn Poland during the Second World War was heard to say, "I believe in the sun even when it isn't shining. I believe in love even when I am alone. I believe in God even when He is silent." That could have been uttered when destruction came to Jerusalem and the beloved holy temple. It was a devastating time for those who lived there. It must have seemed as though God had truly abandoned them.

In my ministry, counselees often have shared with me their trouble with God. Some say they can't talk to a God who would let their loved one die. Others say they are angry with God because of their terminal illness. They cry that God is not fair. Often I have encouraged a counselee to pray as honestly and sincerely as he can. If you are angry with God, tell Him so. If you are disappointed in God, tell Him so. If you think that He is unfair, tell Him so. I learned a long time ago that God is big enough to handle my troubled emotions. Once one is honest with God and opens up to Him, the way is cleared for God to bring healing, solace, and peace to the troubled heart.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, O God, for encouraging us to be honest with You. Help us always to remember that we can cast all our cares upon You, for You care for us. Help us to trust You even when You are silent. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.



## THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 74:12-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever (Revelation 7:12, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Our God Reigns”

An unusual misprint showed up in a printed program of a performance of Handel’s *Messiah*. It made part of the “Hallelujah Chorus” to read, “The Lord God Omnipotent resigneth.”

Well, nothing could be further from the truth. God is indeed on His throne and He reigns. Psalm 74 begins with a lament over the fall of Jerusalem. We read that Scripture in yesterday’s devotion. But the psalmist knew God had not fallen. He was still the mighty Creator who had made Heaven and earth. He was still in control of the sea and the monsters living in it, still in control of the sun and the seasons, still in control of the kingdoms of earth. At the proper time He would defeat the people who had defeated Israel. When Israel was ready to return to Him, He was ready to return peace to Israel.

What a wonderful reminder that we serve and worship the Creator of the universe! Our King does not tire, and He is ready at all times to help those who will but put their trust in Him. He does not resign—He reigns!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Sovereign Lord, may we this day do our part to bring blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might to our God forever and ever. How wonderful that the Creator of the universe is indeed our living and all powerful God. In the name of Jesus, we sing our praises to You. Amen.

November 11

## IS HE DELIGHTED WITH ME?

**SCRIPTURE:** Lamentations 3:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath (Lamentations 3:1).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Take My Life and Let It Be"

Living in a society that has cleverly covered up sin, we find it hard to understand that our actions can make God angry. This Scripture draws a clear picture of a man who finds himself in darkness, suffering, and pain. He feels so hedged in that he cannot get out.

Many people in our society have felt these same sad conditions, but the writer of Lamentations recognized his suffering as a direct result of God's disapproval of sin.

People today look in every other direction to place blame for wrong choices and bad actions. Counselors tell us dysfunctional family circumstances are to blame. Or perhaps people have been victims of parents who did not understand acceptable types of discipline. Scientists search the genes for biological answers to bad behavior. We are more interested in explaining away sin than in dealing with personal responsibility for our actions.

It is time for us as Christians to take an honest look at our lives, recognize those things we are choosing that do not please God, and take whatever action is necessary to change.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, help me throughout this day to make choices that delight You and demonstrate my desire to seek Your approval of my choices and actions. In the name of Jesus, I bow before You today. Amen.

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November 11-17. **Patti Jefferson** and her husband, David, serve with the Plainfield Christian Church in Plainfield, Indiana. They are parents to three grown sons.

## ON TARGET

**SCRIPTURE:** Lamentations 3:10-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow (Lamentations 3:12).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

“Set me as a mark”? Can it be that God would make me a target for His arrow?

I remember hearing the story of William Tell. He was so skilled with a bow that he asked his small son to stand with an apple on his head. The boy calmly waited as his father shot the arrow through the apple.

I am a little nervous just thinking about how trusting William Tell’s son had to be. I think I would have asked my father to let me hold a pumpkin or a watermelon over my head. Yet this Scripture clearly states, “He hath . . . set ME as a mark for the arrow.” God is not looking at an object on my head. He is taking aim directly at me.

God is more thorough than I would choose to be. I would like for Him to look past my life at an apple or a pumpkin. But God chooses to aim right at the source; He intends to affect the core of my heart.

His arrow of conviction will point out my sin.

His arrow of correction will turn me around.

His arrow of conversion will bring me to seek His will.

His plan is much better than my own. I am ready to stand wherever He asks me to stand and let him take perfect aim at my life.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, help me to stand perfectly still as You take aim with every arrow for my good. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

November 13

## GOD AND THE CANDY MAN

**SCRIPTURE:** Lamentations 3:21-30

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over (Luke 6:38).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Fill My Cup, Lord”

A kind old gentleman owned a small grocery store when I was a little girl. My friends and I would wait in line for him to fill our nickel bags of candy. He would scoop up a nickel’s worth and then drop several more pieces on the top. Then he would wink and say he would see us another day.

Verses 24 and 25 of today’s Scripture make me smile when I think back to my childhood. Verse 24 says, “The Lord is my portion . . . therefore will I hope in him.” And 25, “The Lord is good unto them that wait for him.”

Think what it means to recognize Jesus as our “portion.” I may ask God to give me many things; but if I pay attention to the Scriptures and to my heart, I see that God has already given more than I could ask for when He gave me a special “portion” of His Son. I see myself holding out my hands, and He fills them with all that I need and more than I can hold.

That gentleman who filled my sack with more than I asked for and then promised to see me again another day—can it be that God put him there so I could have just a glimpse of what God is like?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, heavenly Father, for knowing my needs even before I ask You to help me, for giving me what is best for my life and not just giving me the things for which I selfishly ask. God, fill my cup today and help me to be satisfied with the portion You provide. Thank You. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

## SEEKING HIS PRESENCE

**SCRIPTURE:** Lamentations 3:31-39

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "This Is the Day"

We all experience days when life is beautiful and everything seems to go just right. We feel like praising God because each event in the day is so perfect we know He must have blessed it. Then come the days when we wonder if God has hidden himself far, far away where He cannot see us nor hear if we call to Him.

How grateful we should be that God enabled Jeremiah to write words that remind us of God's mercy and His perfect direction of our lives! "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?" (vv 37, 38).

Regardless of the events of the day, God is present and knows our need for Him. Regardless of how badly we mess things up, the plan of correction and the opportunity to learn from the experience is very close by.

We may not know what kind of day this day will be, but we can be assured that God is not hiding, and His direction is the direction to consider as the day unfolds and the challenges come our way.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, teach me to seek Your will in all that I choose to do this day. Guide my words as well as my thoughts and actions. I want to praise You all day long, regardless of the circumstances I face. In the name of Jesus, my Savior, amen.

**November 15**

## **THE SOURCE OF DISCIPLINE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Lamentations 3:40-48

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts (Psalm 139:23).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Search Me, O God"

It is interesting to observe children. Often they test authority by deliberately choosing to disobey. Then when punishment is given, the child becomes angry with the one who set the rules instead of becoming angry with himself for his disobedience.

Permission to take one cookie may result in taking two just to see if the cookie giver is counting. When permission to stay out an extra hour is denied, a teenager may come in ten minutes late just to make a point. When all the cookies are put back on the shelf, or the teen is told he or she will be staying home the following weekend, who does the culprit blame?

Look at the wisdom of Jeremiah in these verses. Should a man complain when he is being punished for his sins? Hummm. Maybe it's time for a cookie jar flashback or a realistic response to God's direction of our dates. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." If we grow up enough to understand that God will ask us to do what is best for us, and if we obey Him gladly, we'll find ourselves resting comfortably in His arms instead of standing fearfully alone, knowing our punishment is inevitable.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father in Heaven, I know You are able to guide and direct me throughout this day. I seek Your will. I want You to lead me away from the temptations that come and give me wisdom to obey Your commands. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

## SEEKING GOD'S PRESENCE

**SCRIPTURE:** Lamentations 3:55, 66

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you (James 4:8).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "There Is a Place of Quiet Rest"

The Scriptures are very expressive when writers describe their interaction with God. The psalmists speak of the Lord as a shepherd, a fortress, a rock, or a shield as well as the One who planned our days before we were born and who knows our very thoughts.

Jeremiah was expressive as he spoke of calling on God "out of the low dungeon." It seems he was in deep trouble, but still he was calling out to God. And then in the following verses he wrote refreshing words telling us that God drew near to him in that day and told him not to be afraid.

Every description that shows God responding with a deep and loving concern for the one who calls to Him gives me assurance that God will hear me, too. Most clearly Jeremiah's description shows God coming near to the one who seeks after Him.

It is comforting to know that God loves me just as He loved Jeremiah thousands of years ago. And, just as God cared enough to respond to Jeremiah, He'll understand my heart and come to be near to me when I seek Him.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, help me to know that You are interested in every part of my life and that You will come near to me if I draw near to You. I will be conscious of Your presence within me throughout this day. Thank You for loving me. In the name of Jesus, amen.

**November 17**

## **THE MILLIONAIRE, GOD, AND ME**

**SCRIPTURE: Psalm 13**

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me (Psalm 13:6).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "When Upon Life's Billows"

Recently the papers told of a millionaire whose will disposed of his wealth in surprising ways. His gifts were not given to family members or longtime friends, but to chance acquaintances who had helped him or who needed his help.

There was an elevator operator whose whimsical personality had lifted the millionaire's spirit. There were people unrelated to his family whose misfortunes made them in need. There was a young woman whose ambition was to be a model. Her face had been scarred, and this gentleman gave money to pay for extensive surgeries. This man went beyond the call most of us feel to make a difference in the lives of others.

Similar is the action God takes toward His children, as described by the psalmist in today's final verses. Trusting in God's mercy and to rejoicing in His salvation causes us to sing because He has dealt bountifully with us. His response is more extraordinary than the actions of the millionaire, for God's mercy can never be measured in dollars. His concern for us comes from a love that is unlimited and will never die.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** I praise You, God, for meeting every need of my life. Thank You for providing for each circumstance I will face today. Help me to recognize Your presence in all my activities. Thank You for dealing bountifully with me. Thank You for giving me salvation—the greatest gift of all. In the name of Jesus who came to bring that salvation to me. Amen.



## BEING THE PEOPLE OF GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 37:15-22

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Am His, and He Is Mine"

Everyone has heard of famous family feuds. Shakespeare wrote about the one between Romeo's and Juliet's families. The famous Hatfield and McCoy feud supposedly lasted through generations. A family feud may continue when its family members no longer remember why they are angry with one another.

God told Ezekiel that He was going to make Judah and Israel into one nation, His nation. There would be only one king to rule over this nation instead of the two that had ruled over the split nation.

As a parent, I am frustrated when my children fight. I know they love one another, and I know disputes occur in families. Still I want my children to get along, peaceably. Often, when a fight breaks out, I will set them facing one another. They have to face one another until they apologize. Most often they break out in laughter, then apologize. Again we are a united family.

God meant His ancient nation to be joined together, and now He wants His church likewise to be in harmony. As the family of God, we need to be united by His love.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, help us to do today what You want us to do. Help us to be family members who please You, both in our physical family and in our spiritual family, Your church. In Jesus' name, amen.

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November 18-24. **Judy Lanham** serves as Director of Children's Ministries with the Kingsway Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. She and her husband, Mark have two children.

## CLEANSED AND RESTORED

**SCRIPTURE:** Ezekiel 37:23-28

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God (Ezekiel 37:23, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “If My People Will Pray”

If we truly belonged to God and were aliens and pilgrims in this world (1 Peter 2:11), how would our lives change? What are the “idols” and “detestable” things we put before God? What would have to be cast out, destroyed, or rearranged in our lives so that we would truly be His people and He would be our God? If we would take one week and list all our activities and the amount of time given to each, what would we find to have top priority in our lives?

I’m sure television, movies, sports, and eating would all share a large portion of my time, besides my job and family activities. But where would God fit in? Does He have enough of my time for devotions, Christian reading, church attendance, and other Christian activities?

God wants to cleanse us and make us His people. Prayerfully consider if you are allowing “idols” to take your time, money, and talents away from the one true God. Then, if you realize something is taking the place of God, allow Him to deliver you from that thing. Allow Him to be truly your God so that you may be truly one of His people.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, help us to rid our lives of the “idols” that take our time and money. Help us to be Your people and allow You truly to be our God. Thank You for loving us and bringing us back to You through Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## GOD WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE

**SCRIPTURE:** Zechariah 9:11-17

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord their God will save them in that day as the flock of His people (Zechariah 9:16, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Gentle Shepherd”

In the last several months I have battled one illness after another. I'm sure my insurance company is wondering how anyone can have so many tests and see so many doctors. But God has seen me through this frustrating time and restored me to health so I can go on with His work.

In our Bible reading the nation of Israel is called Ephraim and Zion. That nation had been released from captivity in Babylon, but it was sick spiritually. The people were so busy with their own business that they had no time to rebuild the temple and restore the proper worship of God. God wanted to restore their spiritual health so He could use them in His work.

God wants to use us. He wants to restore His relationship with us and achieve His purpose through us. We often say, “I can't do that,” when in reality we just don't want to do it. God empowers us to do His will. How wonderful to know that the Creator, the Lord of all, wants to be the Lord of our lives and make us into what He has planned for us to be. Today, let us allow God to work in us.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, bring needed restoration to my life. Restore relationships I have destroyed. Restore an eagerness to work for You. Restore the newness of being Your child. In Jesus' name, amen.

November 21

## THE PERFECT CARPENTER

**SCRIPTURE:** Amos 9:11-15

**VERSE FOR THE DAY:** The One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens, and has founded His vaulted dome over the earth, He who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth, the Lord is His name (Amos 9:6, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "How Great Thou Art"

My grandparents lived in English, Indiana, a small community near the Ohio River. Often we visited them there. I will never forget the destruction of their home and the entire community. The little creek behind their property became a roaring river and flooded the whole town. Bravely the people rebuilt the homes and stores.

In just a few short years, another flood ripped through English and completely destroyed it. This time the town appealed to the state for aid and rebuilt their town at the top of the hill instead of in the valley.

A flood of sin destroyed the nation of Israel, but our Scripture reading for today says God proposed to build it again and make it secure.

The master Carpenter, Jesus Christ, has a detailed drawing of our lives. We need to allow Him to build us, restore us, and move us in the directions He wants us to go. Sometimes it may take something devastating to turn us from our mistaken ways and make us see what He wants to do with our lives. Let's not wait for an earth-shattering experience before we turn our lives over to our Father.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, help us to be open to Your working in our lives. Help us to be willing to be used by You for Your kingdom and the building of that kingdom here. In Jesus' name, amen.

## WALKING HIS WALK

**SCRIPTURE:** Zechariah 10:6-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Follow, I Will Follow Thee"

On vacation in Florida, we were spending the day on the beach. After doing the sandcastle-building routine, we went in the water, jumping into waves and allowing them to carry us back to the beach. Then we found ourselves stepping on some of the most fascinating ocean creatures we had ever seen. There were thousands of shells on the beach. Inside of these shells were tiny little critters that tried with all their might to walk up the beach and out of the water. Each time they would get just a little way, and then the wave would rush up and carry them back toward the ocean. We watched, fascinated, as these poor little creatures tried to make it out of the water. It was a pointless battle; a battle we knew they could never win.

As we moved on, I began to think of how often I do the "critter-walk" in my Christian walk. I walk one step closer to the Lord, and move back two. I wonder if the Lord watches with frustration, realizing I will never accomplish the impossible on my own, knowing that if I turn to Him, He can help me succeed in "walking His walk."

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, I turn my life over to You so that I may walk in light. Thank You that You continue to lead me in spite of all the times I fail. In Jesus' name, amen.

## THE LORD OF COMFORT

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 49:8-15

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38, 39, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Stand Amazed in the Presence"

One of my very best friends in elementary school was a girl named Carolyn. We were in the same grade and had been together in school for three years. I had other, good friends, but there was something really special about Carolyn. During a lot of weekends I slept on Carolyn's living room floor. I remember how we used to listen for the early footsteps of the milkman on Saturday morning. All those hours together made us steadfast friends.

When we were in fifth grade, Carolyn's father was transferred to Georgia. We did the usual, "I'll never forget you," and promised to write forever. Carolyn moved; and we did correspond for several weeks, maybe even months. But we didn't correspond for years. Other best friends moved in to take the place of the absent one. I'm sure that's what happened in Georgia, too.

How reassuring it is to know God's Word and to read, "Even these may forget, but I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15, *New American Standard Bible*). Time will never erase God's love for us, and nothing—no nothing—can separate us from the love of God. We know that God is always there!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, how wonderful You are! How great it is to know that nothing can separate us from You and that You will always be there for us! Help us to share Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.

## SHOUT FOR JOY!

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 98

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Let the rivers clap their hands; let the mountains sing together for joy (Psalm 98:8, *New American Standard Bible*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

We had been to the Smoky Mountains for our honeymoon, and we returned for a second honeymoon. From our cabin in the mountains we could watch the mist settle into the valleys and wrap its way through the trees each evening. The scenery was breathtaking. One day we drove up to the top of the Smokies and took several side trips during our adventure. One such stop was along the wide river that flows down through the mountains. We walked along its bank and listened for a long time to the beautiful, almost musical sound of the rushing water. We could also hear the breezes hum through the trees as though the mountains were singing. We sat on a rock for a long time and just listened to the sweet song of God's creation.

Isn't it great to hear God's creation shout joyfully and sing praises to its Creator? How much more should we who have voices do! We have so much to sing and be thankful for! Seeing and hearing God's creation is something for which to praise God. We can be thankful especially for our salvation! Let us shout for joy!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, how majestic is Your name, Your creation, Your power, and Your love. We listen to creation's song and we too want to praise You for all You have done for us. Thank You for creating us, for saving us, and for the promises You have given. We thank You for giving us a voice with which to praise You. You are indeed wonderful! In Your Son's precious name, amen.

November 25

## GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Samuel 1:9-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6, New International Version).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** Sweet Hour of Prayer"

During a minister's prayer one Sunday morning there was a loud whistle from the back of the church. Jimmy's mother was horrified and quickly made him be quiet. After the church service was over she asked, "Jimmy, whatever made you do such a thing?" Jimmy answered soberly, "I asked God to teach me to whistle . . . and He just then did!" The Bible is clear that in all things, we are to bring our requests before the Lord.

Hannah had not been able to have a child, and in the culture of that time, was subject to much ridicule and scorn. Hannah went to the Lord and laid her heart open before Him. Hannah was praying with such intensity that Eli, the priest, thought she was drunk and rebuked her. She told him of her anguish and he sent her away with a blessing. The Lord answered Hannah's prayer and gave her a son, Samuel.

For any problem or any frustration, for big things, for small things, for the impossible or the overwhelming there is One who hears, understands, and answers!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father God, today I bring You everything that is on my heart. I know that You can work in all things. I humbly bring my requests before You and thank You for the answers that will come. Amen.

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November 25-30. **Randy Richardson** is the Village Manager at the Mason Christian Village in Mason, Ohio. He previously served the church in Yucaipa, California, as Minister of Music and Senior Adults.



## THE JOY OF THE LORD

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Samuel 2:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** My heart rejoices in thee Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. (1 Samuel 2:1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “To God Be the Glory”

Webster’s dictionary defines joy as a very good feeling; happiness and delight. Joy was definitely an emotion Hannah was feeling. The Lord had answered her prayer. The opening portion of her prayer lets the reader know that her joy was in the Lord and that in the Lord her “horn” of strength was lifted high. She was feeling good!

Satan does not want us to be joyful. Why? Because without the joy of the Lord we are defeated in attitude and spirit. The Scripture reminds us that the joy of the Lord is our strength. It is a weapon we can use against Satan and his demonic forces. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit—a demonstration of the Spirit’s work within the life of a Christian.

How can we have that joy? Romans 15 tells us that there is joy in our fellowship. Nehemiah 8 reminds us that there is joy in reading God’s Word. In 1 Peter chapter 1 we see that joy is bathed in the hope that there are better days coming soon. James 1 and Romans 5 tell us that even in trials we can find joy. And the story of Hannah lets us know of the joy experienced in the demonstration of God’s power and faithfulness through answered prayer.

Today, choose joy and give God the glory!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O mighty God, in whatever may come today, whether good or bad, may I see the perfection of Your plan and may You see a joyful servant. Amen.

November 27

## FAITHFUL TO THE TASK

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Chronicles 23:28-32

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Make Me a Servant”

Have you ever been asked to prepare the bread and juice for the communion service, clean the church building, or make sure that all of the chairs and tables were set up for a special meeting? Do you ever feel that these jobs are not honored jobs? Well, these jobs were include in the “job description” for the well-respected and honored position of the priest in the Old Testament. The priests knew that each job that they performed, whether it was standing in the morning to praise and thank the Lord or cleaning up after a sacrifice, was part of their service to the Lord.

Two senior saints were asked by their minister to help clean the church building. One replied that she had been a prominent member of the community and would not use a vacuum cleaner. The other, also highly respected, had a different response. She thanked the minister for the opportunity to serve her Lord. She was not only blessed in her work but was also a blessing through her work. Her life and her work has been an example for many.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Almighty God, as I am called on this day to do something for You, may I approach Your work with an appreciation for the opportunity to serve. May You see me give my very best and may my effort and attitude bring glory and honor to You. In the name of my Savior I pray. Amen.

## GOOD NEWS!

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:14-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He will be a great joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord (Luke 1 :14, 15, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “People Need the Lord”

A young mother who was expecting her third child brought her two small boys to a neighbor's house for a visit. The neighbor's cat was about to give birth to a litter of kittens. The mother of the boys thought this an opportune time to begin explaining how babies are born. Later, when she had her baby, her husband took the boys to the hospital to see their new sister. While they were standing at the nursery window, one brother asked, “Are all those babies ours?” Sometimes the message gets mixed up.

God wanted to be sure that the news he sent to Zechariah was clearly understood. An angel was sent to deliver the message. Zechariah was told that his wife would have a son, John, who would have a special mission. . . to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. God, at just the right time, made the way clear for the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. John played a very special part in the ministry of Jesus. The good news that was shared with Zechariah was to help prepare for the ultimate good news: salvation for the whole world through Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O God, give me the opportunity to share the good news today. May You work through me so that Your message of hope is clear. Help me to tell others the good news that comes through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Amen.

November 29

## THERE IS NO NEED TO DOUBT

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:19-23

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak (Luke 1:22, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Trust and Obey”

Zechariah had just received news from the angel, Gabriel, that Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth, was to have a baby. Being somewhat surprised by this announcement because of his and Elizabeth’s advanced age, Zechariah asked, “How can I be sure of this?” Because of his lack of faith in the angel’s message, he was unable to speak until all that the angel had said would happen came to pass.

I remember a wonderful example of faith that I was able to witness. I was finishing a particularly uplifting rehearsal with a children’s choir and a young girl volunteered to pray at the close of our practice time. After a few moments of silence, she lifted her hands toward heaven and prayed, “God, I just want to reach up and give you a great big hug.” There was no fear, no doubt, no questions—only a child-like faith which took the Lord at His Word and was an encouragement to my faith.

Perhaps it is time for all of us to find child-like faith and to choose to live consistent lives of obedient faith without doubt, fear, or reservation.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father God, please take away the clutter that clouds my vision of Your truth as You speak to me through Your Word, I pray that I will listen with a child-like faith and respond with a mature understanding. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

## GOD IS AWESOME!

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 111 :1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Great are the ways of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them (Psalm 111:2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “How Great Thou Art”

Many years ago in France, a famous astronomer concluded a lecture he had given by saying, “I have swept the universe with my telescope, and I find no God.” Whereupon, a famous musician replied from the audience, “That statement is as unreasonable as for me to say, ‘I have taken this violin apart and I have examined each piece of it with a microscope and I find no music.’”

Great are the works of the Lord. We see them all around us, from the infinite measure of creation and the universe to the miracle of a brand new baby, God’s world is wondrously displayed. Let us extol Him for His ways are beyond our understanding. His works are faithful and just. Our God is powerful and trustworthy. He is gracious and compassionate, righteous and holy. We feel His provision in all things. Truly, God is awesome and worthy of our praise.

Let us choose today to recognize the wonderful work of the Lord in our world and in our lives. Let’s give to Him all the glory and praise.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, today I just want to offer up a song of praise and thanksgiving. You are my Creator and I praise You for Your faithful provision. You are an Awesome God, and I bow before You this day. Help me to realize that only in You do I have salvation and safety in this world and the world to come. Thank You for allowing Your Son to be my Savior. In His name, I pray. Amen.

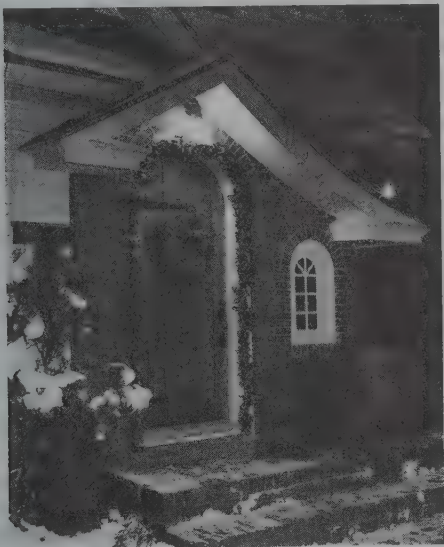
## My Prayer Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

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# DEVOTIONS

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## December

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photo by Florence Sharp

**December 1**

## **GROWING STRONG IN SPIRIT**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:76-80

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** And the child grew and became strong in spirit (Luke 1:80, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Are Ye Able”

If a runner wants to win a race, he will not enter the contest without great preparation. There will be time spent in the gym and on the track getting muscles in top shape. Running times will be recorded and goals will be set. Mentally a runner will prepare himself for the race and when the time comes he will be ready to be the best that he can be.

John was getting ready to do what God had called him to do. God knew that John needed time for preparation because his mission was great. He was to be a prophet of the Most High and he was to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. He was to bring to people the knowledge of salvation and the forgiveness of sin. John was taking the time and effort to become strong in spirit.

Daily times of refreshment for the mind and the body, time in the Word, and prayer are all ways that can help us prepare for whatever task the Lord may call us to do. Will He find us ready? Will He find us strong in the spirit?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** God, just as a runner would prepare for a race, help me to be prepared, strong in spirit, and ready to serve You. I hold to the promise that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. In Jesus' name, amen.

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December 1. **Randy Richardson** is the Village Manager at the Mason Christian Village in Mason, Ohio. He previously served the church in Yucaipa, California, as Minister of Music and Senior Adults.



## GOD IS FAITHFUL

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 138

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands (Psalm 138:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

Our family stood in the airport awaiting our departure to serve as missionaries in Africa. We were surrounded by Christian friends, but we were about to venture alone into the unknown. I felt as if I were poised on the edge of a cliff. The next step would be a sheer drop.

I did not know what the future held. I had to focus my thoughts on God’s faithfulness. Keeping my eyes on Him quieted my heart and mind because I knew He is wholly trustworthy. However, there was still the thrill of stepping off the cliff. How would God prepare the way for us? How would He help us? How would He provide for us?

God never asks us to do that for which He does not provide the resources. With confidence in Him, we climbed aboard that plane. We discovered that, “the eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27, *New International Version*).

Mary is one who stood on the precipice. God had chosen her to bear the Savior of the world. She entrusted herself to His loving plan and found Him faithful.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, You are sovereign of the universe; nothing is too difficult for You. Help us to accept Your plan for our lives; help us to trust You completely. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

December 3

## BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 1:18-25

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Ephesians 4:32, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Is Your Life a Channel of Blessing?”

Talk about an awkward situation! Joseph’s sweetheart was expecting a child, and Joseph wasn’t the father. What was a good man to do?

Mary and Joseph were betrothed, a step beyond engagement, but not fully united in marriage. At this point, a divorce was necessary to dissolve the relationship.

Poor Mary! She had done nothing wrong, but her condition told a different story. It must have been frustrating. Yet we read of no temper tantrums or sulking. I picture her quietly, perhaps desperately, waiting for God to help her.

And what was Joseph to think? He was a good, kind man and wanted to spare Mary as much pain as possible. He too may have prayed for guidance.

Then the angel came and shed light on the problem. Joseph got his instruction and obeyed.

Situations are not always as they seem. We are too often quick to judge people on what we see or hear rather than on the truth. We, like Joseph, should treat others with kindness. If we seek God’s guidance, we may avoid misunderstandings and hurtful actions.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Lord, for all the good relationships in our lives. Help us to avoid quick judgments. Please give us a heart of kindness in dealing with people, especially those we love. Lord, give us wisdom to know how to love people as You love them. Amen.

## HUMBLE SERVICE

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:46-56

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs (Psalm 100:2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "All for Jesus! All for Jesus!"

One of the greatest compliments my husband ever received was given to him in Africa. We were leaving the field and were meeting for the last time with dearly loved brothers and sisters. One minister, who was especially close to Bill, said of him, "I am losing my walking stick."

A walking stick is very useful to an African man. It provides protection against animals or enemies. With it he checks the path for snakes or carries a bundle over his shoulder. It is good for bearing some of his weight during a long walk.

The minister was saying my husband had been a great help to him. The missionary had humbly served under the capable leadership of that African minister.

Mary rejoiced in being chosen for service. She recognized that greatness is servanthood. She had not chosen her service, and perhaps she felt a little overwhelmed. The Holy Spirit through Elizabeth encouraged her greatly, and she responded with a song of acceptance and praise.

When we humble ourselves and allow God to work His will in us, we live lives of service and praise.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father in Heaven, You are our Lord. We wish to be humbly obedient to You in all things. Thank You for opportunities to serve You. Help us to see those opportunities and make the most of them. Help us, Father, to gladly and humbly serve every day of our lives. Amen.

**December 5**

## **PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S PLAN**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2:1-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Abide With Me"

My first child was to be born in early January, so during the Christmas season I was "great with child." I thought of Mary during that time. Was she fearful or anxious, as I sometimes was? What did she think of all that was happening to her?

I enjoyed a comfortable home, convenient travel, and, above all, a modern hospital. Mary probably rode a donkey on a long journey and gave birth in a stable. What a brave and faithful young woman she was!

Thinking about Mary during my own waiting time gave me peace of heart. I thought of how she must have put herself in God's hands daily, trusting Him to care for her, her husband and her child. I also thought of the anticipation she must have felt about the coming blessing and the joy she experienced at having a part in God's purpose.

When we are in God's will and participating in His plan, we can expect His provision and blessing. J. Hudson Taylor said, "Depend upon it, God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies." When we put our lives into the hands of the living God, great and marvelous things happen.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father in Heaven, thank You for always knowing what we need. Thank You for giving us the privilege to be involved in Your purpose on this earth. Help us to trust You more, to always look to You to supply our needs. Help us, dear Father, to be faithful. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

## THE ADVENTURE

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 2:13-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe (Proverbs 29:25, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow"

In J.R.R. Tolkien's story, *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins was a very comfortable hobbit, well-fed and cosy in his hobbit-hole house. He had no ambition greater than living a long life of quiet routine with no surprises.

Then along came Gandalf and got him involved in the unsavory prospect of an adventure! As the author explains to us, adventures are inconvenient things. They make you late for dinner, and there is no end to surprises.

When Mary and Joseph were called into special service, their routine Nazareth lives became full of adventure. You would think going to Bethlehem and having their baby born in a stable would be excitement enough. Now they were refugees! Suddenly they were living life on the edge, not sure of what each day would bring. Scary? Yes, adventure often is! But if it's God's adventure, it's exciting, fulfilling, exhilarating, and absolutely secure.

Mary and Joseph and Jesus were in God's hand every moment, and so are we. The Christian life is an adventure, full of danger and trial, but never outside God's care or ability.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, forgive us when we become too attached to our comforts. Help us, Lord, to be open to Your will and Your leading. Thank You for making our lives abundant, interesting, and full. In the name of Jesus, our leader, amen.

December 7

## OUT OF STEP

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 2:19-23

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! (Romans 11:33, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "All the Way My Savior Leads Me"

My son set the alarm clock in his college dorm room for five o'clock in the morning because he was going on a trip with his singing group. He was sure it had rung, so he got up and started down the hall to the shower. It seemed odd that other boys were up that early, then he found that it was only 2:00 A.M., and those boys hadn't gone to bed yet. He was out of step with normal dorm life that night.

God often seems out of step with what we expect. Mary and Joseph may have assumed that the right place for their special Son would be in Jerusalem or near it. Jerusalem was the center of Jewish life and religion, and Jesus was the promised Messiah. But they were prevented from settling there and ended up back in out-of-the-way Nazareth. Mary would nurture her son in an ordinary little town. Joseph would teach Him the common laborer's trade of carpentry.

But there is the beauty of it. Mary's son was Immanuel, God with us. He did not sit among kings and princes, but among us, the ordinary, the average, the everyday.

He did the unexpected. He still does. Watch for it.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father, thank You for coming to be among us. Thank You for showing us in Jesus who You are and what You're like. Help us not to try to make You what we want You to be, but to know You as You are. May we open our hearts and let You come in. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, we pray. Amen.

## CHRISTIAN FAMILY

**SCRIPTURE:** John 19:23-27

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:18, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “The Family of God”

One of the most beautiful things I have ever seen was the act of a church that embraced a single mother and her autistic son. She had been trying to work, provide for her son, and care for his extensive needs. She must have been physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausted. One church fellowship had asked her not to attend with her son because he was too disruptive. Then she “happened” into a church group that welcomed them and surrounded them with Christian love.

Someone always took responsibility for the boy during Sunday school. The volunteer took the boy to a class for as long as he could manage, then found other ways to teach and entertain him. Another volunteer took him during worship, and his mother was able to give her full attention to worship and praise. She left rested, revived, and loved. Mother and child had a spiritual home.

During His suffering, Jesus looked down on His dear, faithful mother. His own brothers did not yet believe in Him, so He entrusted her care to one of His spiritual family. That gesture tells us that as a Christian family we are to love and care for each other.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Father in Heaven, thank You for our Christian family. Help us to cherish, nurture, and help each other. In Jesus’ name, amen.

December 9

## THE BIG, STRONG HAND

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 41:11-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you (Isaiah 41:13, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

The cry of our lives echoes the words of today's hymn: "from our fears and sins release us." Before we can speak clearly we have already begun to communicate that we are afraid. Fear was the initial response of the shepherds when the angels announced that Jesus had come. Why shouldn't it have been? Fear is the response that many of us have to changing circumstances. Isn't it good that God knows what our first response might be? He takes hold of us and says, "Do not fear."

My friend who grew up in the hill country of southern Indiana knows how God allays fears. In his youth, the way home often required walking along a railroad trestle, high above the valley. One wrong step would plunge him to his death. His father walked with him, and that big strong hand of his father held his own. His fear subsided, and they both went home together.

God will take your hand and walk with you through the greatest challenge the day will bring. Do not be afraid.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ You have conquered the worst enemy that I may encounter today. Walk through this day with me, I pray. Release me from my fears, and free me to victorious life in Jesus Christ. In His name I pray. Amen.



## CALM IN THE FACE OF THE CRITICS

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 51:4-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have my law in your hearts: Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults (Isaiah 51:7, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

The painting of George Washington kneeling in prayer is one that is familiar to many Americans. Washington had brought several thousand troops to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, for winter encampment. The winter weather had become severe. Food supplies were running low, and so, also, was morale among the men. Washington had begun to doubt his decision to camp there and he knelt in the snowy field to seek God's guidance in prayer.

From that moment, Washington gained a firm conviction about the rightness of his decision. Spring came, and with it came victory for the colonies. Washington later spoke of those moments in prayer as a major point in the entire war. He had sought assurance from God in the midst of criticism.

You and I can find such calm in the face of life's storms. Your own life has probably known conflict, distress, and criticism. This Christmas season, let Him come into your life anew. He will give you confidence in what is right. He will give strength against those who are wrong. He will give you peace. You can be calm in the face of the harshest critic.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Great Prince of Peace, I hear the Christmas message of peace on earth and I claim that peace for myself. Make me honest when my critics are right. Make me godly and confident when my critics are wrong. Remove my fear of hurt, and strengthen my resolve to go on for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## NO NEED FOR SHAME

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 54: 4-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame (Isaiah 54:4, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks”

Some people truly ought to be ashamed. Russell Baker, longtime columnist for the New York Times has written about them: “Virtually every magazine on the newsstand, every book in the drugstore, half the stories in the tabloid press, vast quantities of television entertainment and movies galore depict sexual philandering as a common and casual pastime. The result can only be that any monogamous folks wandering this cultural Sodom and Gomorrah feel positively freakish (*New York Times*, quoted in *Reader’s Digest*, November 1994, page 161).

When philandering becomes “a common and casual pastime,” people need to be ashamed, but some never will. The Christian, however, needs never to be ashamed. Why? The Christ of Christmas became the Christ of the cross, carrying for us the shame we could not carry.

Do you need to be ashamed? Of course not, if you belong to Christ. With the temptations your day will bring, take a moment to reassure yourself. Then resume your activity without fear. Jesus Christ has loosened the stranglehold of sin for you. Enter into the day with joy.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, as with the shepherds of long ago, give to me today new meaning to the words, “Fear not.” Remind me of the victory over sin which Jesus Christ achieved for me. Thank you for the joy of release from its heavy burden. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

## DO NOT FEAR. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

**SCRIPTURE:** Haggai 2:4-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** “I am with you,” declares the Lord Almighty. This is what I covenanted with you. . . . And my spirit remains among you. Do not fear (Haggai 2:4, 5, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “God Will Take Care of You”

“Do not fear.” Doesn’t the world’s direction seem frightening though? Anything goes, so long as no one is hurt. Meanwhile, the hurt only grows. Some of us lock the doors of our homes and the doors of our hearts. Our fears run deep.

The major news magazines do little to allay our fright. As I write this, the past week has brought feature articles on rampant crime, shamelessness in America, and the hedonistic lives of some of our idols. The person who tries to live by a higher moral standard certainly can feel alone.

In such a time, come these words: “I am with you. . . . Do not fear. . . . In a little while . . . I will shake all nations.” Like a great fanfare they come heralding hope. They announce the Father who is never far away, the Son who lives and reigns and will return, and the Spirit who never leaves our side. Do not fear the power of this world for evil; God will deal with this world. In this generation He has shaken the repressive Soviet government. He has shaken the lives of countless false gods of our culture. He will shake into submission every power of the evil one. Do not fear; you are not alone. The glory of the Lord will be revealed.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, sometimes it seems that there are few of us who want to walk in Your footsteps. Remind me today that I need never walk it alone. May evil’s power be shaken, and Your glory reflected in me. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

December 13

## THE FOLLY OF OUR FEARS

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 12:22-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear (Luke 12:22, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “His Eye In On the Sparrow”

William Willimon is dean of the chapel, a beautiful gothic building, on the campus of Duke University. He says that it was, for many years, the most overly built building on campus. What campus building does he believe now holds that distinction? The medical center. He says that it's a monument to the folly of our greatest fear: death.

We spend a lot of time and energy on salving our fears. The Ford Motor Company currently spends more on health care for its employees than on steel for its cars. Something more than a routine check-up is pushing our buttons.

Is control the issue? Perhaps. It may be time for us to remind ourselves that our control is futile. You can't make a beautiful lily, and neither can I. It's as simple as that. Is too much love of this life an issue? Then it may be time for us to remember that the healthiest body and the weakest frame meet precisely the same end.

Meet life today, with the God who provides for ravens and lilies. He will also provide for you. Entrust your life to His care; you need never fear the result. He will provide for eternity.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Great Shepherd and Almighty God, how good it is to picture the simple beauty of a flower or a bird in lofty flight, and remember that You provide care for my life too. Forgive the selfishness of my worry. Today I surrender my destiny to You. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

## GOD IS OUR SHIELD

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 15:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward (Genesis 15 :1, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

Several years ago, a television commercial for toothpaste used a protective shield. The announcer stood behind a large piece of glass—the shield. We could see him there, and we thought that we could reach out and touch him, but we simply couldn’t penetrate that protective shield. The toothpaste, we were told, worked in the same way to protect our teeth.

Our story is mundane, but it illustrates the value of a shield for life’s challenges. God has provided a shield for our lives because He is our King. He protects His subjects.

Do not fear today’s outcome. Your prayers, and the prayers of your peers, provide the impetus to do what you must. God has provided the means to ward off the enemy’s attack. Perhaps you notice something different in the way you feel. Is it tempting to become alarmed and think the worst? The apostle Paul’s words can pervade our thoughts instead: “to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21, *New International Version*). The shield has repelled the attack of the evil one and provided the Lord’s perspective.

Abram thought that his age was an obstacle to having children, to raising up God’s people. However, the shield of the Lord, the One Who created it all, surpassed the natural law. Today, use the shield. Let the King care for His subject.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Heavenly Father, forgive the moments when I doubt. Today, I claim Your spiritual power. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

**December 15**

## **LET EVERYTHING PRAISE THE LORD**

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 150:1-6

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord (Psalm 150:6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “All Creatures of Our God and King”

First, I could smell something wonderful—the clean smell of the air after a rain. Then, we got out of the car, and I added the sounds I heard to that fresh, clean fragrance. From beyond the buildings came great joyous clanging of tower bells in the distance. We walked toward the sounds, which, of course, began a measured crescendo.

As we turned the corner, visual elements took hold—a lush expanse of village green and, there, beyond, the great and massive cathedral of Lichfield, England. We strode across the green, and the facade of this glorious church building loomed larger before us. As we neared the entrance, the sounds grew from the great organ inside.

It was about as much as my senses could take: the beautiful day, the bells, the lawn, the organ, the glorious church—all to the glory of God. You and I can view all of created life with the same sense that I was afforded that day in Lichfield. All living things were created to praise the Lord.

Today, take joy in God’s creation. Do not so much grieve over the ravages of our surroundings and the damages we have inflicted by our sins. Rejoice over what each living thing can be, for it can be an offering of praise to it’s Creator. Join with all creation in making your day an offering of praise to the Lord.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Creator and Sustainer of life, may I be used as an offering of praise to You. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

## RIGHTEOUS SAVIOR

**SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 23:1-8

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Will Praise Him!”

“If you build it they will come,” said the mysterious voice to the Iowa farmer in the movie, *Field of Dreams*. Build what? Who will come? The story turned on those questions.

Do you hear a similar voice as we approach Christmas, a voice urging us to build something and receive someone?

Jesus is the righteous Savior. He is fully approved by the Father. If we welcome Him, He makes us children of God (John 1:12). He heals us from the curse of sin. He is righteousness in us.

When we are children of God, He comes to us more fully as we make a larger place for Him, as we make room in our lives, as we devote ourselves more fully to Him. Each Christmas—indeed every day of our lives—brings a new opportunity to obey Him more fully, to make a larger place for the one whom the prophet called “the Lord our righteousness.”

What are we to build? Not a baseball field as the Iowa farmer did, but an altar. We build it not in the center of a cornfield, but in the center of our hearts. There we give ourselves in service (Romans 12:1, 2).

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord Jesus, You are my righteous Savior. You stand before the Father on my behalf. Come into my heart this Christmas season. Amen.

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December 16-22. **Bill O'Connor** ministered with congregations of the Church of the Nazarene for thirty years. He is a freelance writer, conference speaker, seminar leader and the founder of Northwest Christian Resource Service of Newberg, Oregon.

## LOOK WHO'S COMING!

**SCRIPTURE:** Zechariah 9:9-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

Kings have always come into public view with pomp and circumstance. They've come riding on white chargers. They've been carried by chariots, gold-encrusted carriages, or stretch limousines. When Jesus came to Jerusalem, He had no such conveyance. He came riding on a donkey! It's like the President of the United States arriving in a Volkswagen beetle!

The Lord's arrival at Bethlehem was even less noticed. Except for the shepherds, His birth was a worldwide non-event. It was as if God gave a party and nobody came.

Jesus is coming this Christmas season to everyone who will receive Him. His coming will be as free from ostentation as when He rode into Jerusalem; as simple as when Mary placed Him in the manger. He isn't looking for a public commotion, you see; He's looking for loving disciples who will make room for His lordship and His leadership in their lives.

God invites you to His party. Jesus is coming this Christmas. Will you recognize Him when He comes?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Jesus, You are the coming King. You come in fresh new ways whenever our hearts are open. I invite You to come to my life in a new, powerful, soul-transforming way this season. Help me to recognize You in everything, and to receive You in every possible way. Amen.



## MORE THAN A GENTLE JESUS!

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 72:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor (Psalm 72:4, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

A children’s hymn refers to the Savior as “gentle Jesus, meek and mild.” That’s true, but it isn’t all the truth. He is also powerful Jesus, King of kings, with all authority in Heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus is gentle and kind. He will not damage the wounded heart, nor hurt the aching soul. He is meek; He exercises perfect control over His tremendous strength. But Jesus is no weakling! He was a craftsman who worked with calloused hands. He shaped raw timber to create furniture that was a work of art.

Jesus is a strong Savior. He has defeated sin, the enemy that has conquered all of us at times. As king, Jesus will rule with a rod of iron.

Which do you need? A gentle Jesus who brings you sympathy and comfort and forgiveness? Or an all-powerful Jesus who not only defeats sin and death, but also takes charge of your life to make you all that you ought to be? I need both. Jesus has the power to remake me, to defend me, to save me, and to crush all that would oppress. That’s my kind of Savior!

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Jesus, You are my Savior. You have all power. You possess absolute authority. I invite You to reign in my life. Take control of me. Shape my life, as You shaped timber, into a work of art. Make something of me that I could never make of myself. Amen.

December 19

## A SAVIOR FOR ALL NATIONS

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 72:12-20

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed (Psalm 72:17, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Jesus Is the Sweetest Name I Know”

Names have a way of appearing and disappearing. One generation has its Bills and Janes and Joes, the next has its Jenifers and Jessicas. Some names come in cycles, reappearing every three or four decades; others pass into permanent obscurity. We don’t meet many babies named Augustus or Theophilus these days.

One name has endured for nearly two hundred decades; it is known around the world. Though not given to many children, it is a name that has stood the test of time. The name *Jesus* has endured, and will endure, forever.

Who can forget the Savior who brings deliverance, who pities the weak and the needy and saves them from death? Every nation knows Him because people in every nation have experienced the power of His touch, the warmth of His love, the joy of His salvation.

Christmas is more than a time for remembering that He came, it’s a time for reminding ourselves of what He has done. Let’s remember His marvelous deeds, then let’s fill the earth with shouts of His glory. Let’s proclaim the name of Jesus: “Long may He live!”

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord Jesus, let me bask in the warmth and power of Your name today. Let me remember who You are and what You have done. You are not only the Savior and Deliver for every nation, You are my Savior and Deliverer. I acknowledge and worship You as Lord and Savior of my life. Amen. .

## THE BRIGHTEST LIGHT

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 9:2-7

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “There’s a Song in the Air”

A long-running TV soap opera was called “The Guiding Light.” You had to watch only once to realize that the light those characters had was too weak to lead them out of their confusion and conflict.

The world into which Jesus was born was like a soap opera. The mixture of Romans, Greeks, and Jews, with various religions and philosophies, created a twisting plot. Everyone struggled through the darkness. When Jesus was born, things changed!

Our world is like a soap opera, as are many of our lives. But Jesus is alive today. His light has been shining for nearly two thousand years. It drives the darkness away.

What a thought: “The manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!” Not just any king—THE King. Not an earthly king—the King of the universe. No wonder the prophet Isaiah proclaimed that “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light.” When Jesus was born, a brightness entered the world that forever dispels the darkness of sin. A life came that forever does away with the black fear of eternal death. Let’s step into the light.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord Jesus, Savior of the world, and Savior of my soul, I thank You for coming to earth. I thank You that You’re alive today. Live in me, Lord Jesus. Live through me. Be light in me to dispel my darkness, and to dispel the darkness of those around me. Amen.

## HIS DAY IS COMING

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 60:10-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob (Isaiah 60:16, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"

Have you seen someone you ought to know, but couldn't remember their name? Then have you known the name when it was too late because the person had departed?

Something similar happened at Bethlehem. Shepherds knew who Jesus was, but most people didn't. Again when Jesus was near death, some shouted, "Hosanna"; but later the cry of, "Crucify Him" prevailed.

Most people in Jesus' day failed to recognize who He was; most people in our day make the same mistake. They don't know that the baby born in Bethlehem will reign as Sovereign of the universe. They dismiss Him as a historic figure with little relevance for today.

But His day is coming. Those who failed to recognize Him when He first appeared, like those who dismiss Him today, will recognize Him when He comes again. On that day everyone will know who He is. Everyone—believers and unbelievers alike—will bow to the triumphant Christ. But for the unbelievers, it will be too late.

The Savior has come. He is present in our world today. Let's acknowledge His lordship now.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Jesus, You are Lord. Though others may not recognize You, I know who You are. I open my life to You and invite You to come to me in Your fullness. You are God's gift to the world. I receive You as God's gift for my deepest need. Amen.

## A TIME FOR GIVING

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 4:9-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4:15, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "I Surrender All"

Christians are taught that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." When we're young we have trouble believing that. We'd rather receive Christmas presents than give them any day. It is only as we grow into maturity that we discover the joy of giving.

Many of us, however, have not discovered the greatest joy of the Christmas season. We give gifts to everyone on our Christmas list, but forget the One whose birthday we celebrate. What gift have we for Him?

We would be deeply hurt if people at our birthday party would bring a gift for everyone else, but not one for us. As mature people, we wouldn't think of doing that to a friend. But we unthinkingly do it to Jesus.

The greatest joy, the deepest blessing, the most exalted moment of celebration is found in what takes place between you and your Lord. Will you have a gift for Him this Christmas? Will you give Him your love? Will you give Him your talents in service? He appreciates those gifts. But there's one thing more: What He wants most is YOU.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord Jesus, I thank You for coming to this world, and giving Yourself in payment for my sins. Now I give myself to You. Take all of me, Lord, and use me as You choose. From this moment on, all of me belongs to You. Amen.

## THE WAITING GAME

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 42

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** A man's wisdom gives him patience (Proverbs 19:11, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Joy to the World!"

This holiday season can be described in one word: anticipation. Children are eager to open gifts, and parents are eager to watch them do it. Older parents are waiting for the day the grown offspring return home, and grandparents long for a visit from the grandkids. Such anticipation isn't new to our generation. For hundreds of years the Israelites waited for the Messiah's coming. Much of life is a waiting game.

In our Scripture passage, we see the psalmist longing to worship God with others in the temple. Apparently some difficulty was keeping him from going there. It was hard for him to be patient, but again and again he said God would finally answer his prayer.

Often it is hard to be patient. With fast food, microwaves, and other instant things, we have fewer opportunities to learn patience. We know God will do what is right, but still we try to give Him advice. It is not always easy to see which way He is leading, but we trust Him as the psalmist did. Eagerly we anticipate God's answers, but we must be patient as we wait for them.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** As we wait for Your guidance, fill us with a calm patience. Teach us to trust You especially when we do not know the path You are directing us to travel. Thank You for Your unending love. In Jesus' name, amen.

## CARING FOR THE SAINTS

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Timothy 5:3-10

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (*Galatians 6:9, New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Make Me a Blessing"

One day I was commenting on my Grandmother's new couch. She laughed and explained that it had become too difficult to dislodge some of the older ladies off the seat of the old couch. She had, several years earlier, purchased a new car so she could take them to church.

I don't remember a time she wasn't helping widows in her town. At the age of 92 she began reading to the older people at her local nursing home. We used to laugh at the concept of her taking care of older people because some of them were about twenty years younger than Grandma.

My Grandma was a great example of caring for others and especially the widows in her area. Scripture clearly points out what we are to do. As a church fellowship, we are to care for widows who are alone. As children we are to care for our relatives. Most of us recognize the sacrifices our parents made while raising us. We must honor them by meeting their needs. There are so many who live in nursing homes who have been forgotten. Today plan to write a letter to a loved one or to go visit an older relative.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Thank You, Father, for the faith and example of parents and grandparents. Help us to care for those around us who need our help. Please, Lord, show us how we may come to the aid of those in need. In Jesus' name, amen.

**December 25**

## **REDEEMING THE REDEEMER**

**SCRIPTURE:** Exodus 13:11-16

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Silent Night"

A good friend of mine recently told me a delightful story. She and her husband had prayed for a child and God had blessed them with a son. She was telling this nine-year-old boy what a blessing he was and that they had consecrated him to the Lord. Her young son looked puzzled. In a few moments he carefully asked, "Does that mean I have to live with the preacher and his family?"

According to God's law, every firstborn animal or child belonged to God. A firstborn lamb was offered in sacrifice. An animal not acceptable in sacrifice was redeemed by a lamb. A human boy was redeemed by a payment of money (Exodus 13:11-13). The price of such a boy was five shekels (Leviticus 27:6). Two birds were offered for Mary, marking the end of her quarantine after the birth of Jesus (Leviticus 12:6-8). Our great Redeemer Himself, as a child, was redeemed as required by Jewish law.

On this day we celebrate the birth of our Savior and recognize how much Jesus had to give in order to give us this best Christmas gift ever received.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father in Heaven, we thank You so much for the gift of Your Son. On this special day we have set aside to remember His coming, let us not forget the reason for our joy. We praise You for the wonderful plan of salvation that You freely offer. In the name of Jesus my Savior, I pray, amen.



## SERVICE WITH A SMILE

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 42:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him (John 13:15, 16, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee"

After a busy holiday many of us would welcome help to restore order. A servant would be nice. Some would say mothers are unrecognized and unpaid servants. Mothers put together nutritious meals, keep the clothes washed, and have spotless houses. They prepare a snack for the scout troop with fifteen minutes notice, and they have learned to apply make-up flawlessly in a moving vehicle.

Mothers may not always attain this height of perfection, but they certainly qualify for the position of servant. They are continually serving others. The best example of a servant is found in Jesus Christ. He served by healing, comforting, forgiving, and dying for our sakes. His greatest service to mankind was to deliver us from our prison of sin. Jesus served before His earthly birth (John 1:3) but that birth made Him ready to serve in a different way. Under God's direction and by His own choice, Jesus became a servant for us. Our Savior paid the price of our freedom with His life. For this reason we can serve Him with a smile.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Savior, forgive us when we complain about our burdens. Help us to find real joy in serving You even when the task seems especially difficult. Give us strength to complete the job. We are thankful that You completed Your mission of serving mankind. Thank You, Jesus. In Your name we pray, amen.

## NO WARNING

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "We Shall Behold Him"

We had a neighbor who was at home recovering from severe injuries from a car accident, so the TV had been moved to his bedroom. One morning his six-year-old son was ready for school with time to spare, so he asked to watch TV. One of the Star Wars movies was showing. After promising to be very quiet, the boy was allowed to watch, with the sound turned very low. His father was asleep so the little boy was silent until the fight scene at the end of the movie. Unable to contain himself, he yelled, "Fire! Fire!" Immediately his dad was on his feet looking for the fire.

There are many things in life that catch us unprepared: fire, illness, natural disasters, accidents and others. The Scriptures foretell Jesus' second coming, and for that we *can* be prepared. God wants us to accept His Son; He wants no one to perish. By living a life in Christ we are preparing for our future, whatever it may hold. There won't be a warning when Jesus returns, but those of us who have received the gift of salvation will be praising God and singing glory to His name.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Dear Father, how thankful we are that we do not have to worry about our future! We praise You for providing the gift of salvation. Help us to share this gift with others around us. Thank You for the peace that salvation in Jesus brings. In His name, amen.

## POWER IN A NAME

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 4:5-12

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2: 21, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus”

In the early years of our ministry our finances were stretched very tightly. The sports editor of an Omaha newspaper attended our church. One day he offered us passes to a new experience—a University of Nebraska football game! We were ecstatic, and the day became an adventure long remembered. We walked through those front gates by the power of that editor’s name. It amazed me that we weren’t questioned as we sat in the press box. Could anyone think we were sports writers?

There are many doors that open by the power of names, but these names of prestige and power are nothing in comparison with our Lord Jesus Christ. His name is so wondrous that even the demons quake before it. Peter and John’s ability to heal in Jesus’ name was amazing, as it would be today. Yet even that power to heal is diminished in comparison with the salvation offered to us all. The healing of the man was only a temporary fix, as he eventually died. Salvation offers us the gift of eternal life. To accept the Lord is to gain the most timeless present of all, salvation.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** We may not fully comprehend the magnitude of Your gift of salvation, but we thank You for providing it. May we never take the name of Jesus lightly, but always give Him honor. We bow humbly before You and recognize You as the Creator of all. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

## TRUST NOT IN YOURSELF

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 8:31-39

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3: 5, 6, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** “I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus”

Years ago we became the targets of phone pranks from some teens. One caller asked for Fred. I was delighted because I knew this prank: we would receive many calls for Fred, and the last caller would be “Fred,” asking for messages. I giggled as I made plans to turn the joke on the jokers. When the call from “Fred” came, I was ready. As he asked for his messages, I confidently responded with, “Your mother called. She wants you to bring home a loaf of milk and a carton of bread.” After a long pause the shocked caller thanked me and hung up. I was so embarrassed! All my confidence didn’t keep my words from getting twisted.

If we can’t even be sure of saying what we mean, there isn’t much we can be certain about in this life. Very little is fully in our control, yet we can have confidence in our salvation. We know that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus. No matter how sure we are of ourselves, we tend to fail occasionally; but God’s promises are true. Isn’t it great to serve a God whose words are trustworthy?

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** O Lord, help us to place our wholehearted trust in You. May we remember that nothing can separate us from the love that is in Jesus. We know that all things will work out for good when we walk with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## PREPARE THE WAY

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 3:1-9

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him (Luke 3:4, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "So Send I You"

Only this past summer—after repeated safety sermons—have I allowed my two school-aged children to help mow the lawn. However, I have not allowed them to do the whole job. Before I let them begin their work, I cut a wide path around trees, bushes, and other obstacles. This makes their job safer and less complicated.

John the Baptist did a similar thing as the forerunner of the Messiah. The Gospel-writer Matthew describes John's ministry as "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" John's message and ministry smoothed the way for Jesus; he helped ready people for Jesus' appearance and message.

We do something similar when we befriend unbelievers, show them a kindness, or speak openly about our blessings and struggles. People are not always ready for a bold witness; sometimes we must begin by "preparing the way for the Lord," smoothing the path so that when an opportunity for witness arises, people are ready for Jesus' message to penetrate their hearts.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, make me sensitive to opportunities to tell others about Your saving grace. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

December 30, 31. **Bob Hostetler** is a writer, editor, and speaker from Somerville, Ohio. He and his wife, Robin, have two children, Aubrey and Aaron, and have been foster parents to ten boys.

## WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 3:10-18

**VERSE FOR TODAY:** As John was completing his work, he said: Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming (Acts 13:25, *New International Version*).

**HYMN FOR TODAY:** "Close to Thee"

A woman at a conference expressed glowing praise for some of my writing, using superlative language. It was painful to tell her that the piece of writing that had so affected her was not mine. I was tempted to say nothing; I would have been happy to bask in her praise and accept her admiration without correction. I resisted, however, and told her that the credit belonged to someone else.

The Bible doesn't reveal whether John the Baptist was similarly tempted. I suspect that sometimes he swallowed hard before declaring, "I am not that one." But if he was tempted, he resisted, and steadfastly pointed to Jesus, whose sandals, he said, "I am not worthy to untie."

It is human, when we sing well, or offer prayer bordering on poetry, or exhibit noble conduct, to want to retain some credit. After all, such things do not happen by accident. But we do better when we resist the temptation and—like John—give credit where it is due, pointing to Jesus. Now, even if someone praises what I have written, I will remember to give glory to the Lord.

**PRAYER THOUGHTS:** Lord, give me the humility and honesty to lift You up before others and to give credit—and honor and glory—where it is due. Thank You for allowing us to serve in Your Kingdom. In the name of my Savior I pray. Amen.





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